

The Battle of Pointe du Hoc  
6-8 June 1944  
Interactive Combat Narrative

Prologue

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06 June 1944

To liberate Europe, World War II Allied commanders planned to invade through Normandy, establish a lodgment, and drive through France and into Germany.

Between the two American landing beaches, code-named OMAHA and UTAH, the prominent hundred-foot cliffs of Pointe du Hoc thrust into the sea.

Here the Germans strongly emplaced six 155mm cannons that could wreak havoc on both OMAHA and UTAH beaches with their heavy shells and 25-kilometer range.

Thus it was that the American invasion planners characterized Pointe du Hoc as the single German defensive position most dangerous to their plans.

The Germans considered it unassailable from the sea, and mined and fortified it to defeat an overland assault. They reasoned that by the time attackers forced their way overland through these formidable defenses, the big guns would have devastated the landing forces on both beaches.

What the German planners did not know was that the Americans did not consider the massive 100-foot cliffs of Pointe du Hoc unassailable.

In fact, American military planners believed that a well trained, elite Ranger force could land on the narrow strip below the cliffs, climb the cliffs using ropes and ladders that were propelled aloft by rockets and surprise the defenders. It was a bold and daring plan of action.

Pre-Invasion

As plans matured for an invasion of Europe through Normandy, the Allies sought to prepare the battlefield for a favorable result even as they were mustering and training the forces that would participate in the invasion.

### The German Defenders of Pointe du Hoc

Following their conquests of France and Norway in 1940, the Germans pushed submarine flotillas forward into bases with easy access to the open Atlantic. These were crucial to their Battle of the Atlantic to defeat Great Britain, and the Germans defended the submarine bases and major ports without much attention to the shoreline in between. When the bulk of the German Army and Air Force redeployed east to attack the Soviet Union in 1941, the Germans set out to construct more continuous defenses along their western shores, which came to be called the Atlantic Wall. German military engineering was highly organized, and German defenses featured modular units of standard design – Regelbau. On Pointe du Hoc, for example, you will find Type 134 Munitions Bunkers, Type 501, 502 and 621 Troop Bunkers, Type L409A Anti-Aircraft Positions, Type 679 Artillery Casemates and a Type 636a Command Post. Some components could be pre-fabricated and shipped; others were poured (in the case of concrete) or built on site in accordance with specifications. Standardization of design facilitated construction, and also guaranteed redeployed troops would be speedily familiar with newly occupied positions. Fortifications were to provide economy of force, allowing relatively weak units to delay an attacking enemy while massive counter-attack forces mustered. The Germans first occupied the Pointe du Hoc in May 1942 with eighteen artillerymen and six K418 155mm cannon captured from the French. These men laid out overall plans for the site, identified firing arcs, and began preliminary construction. In November they were substantially reinforced with troops and also joined by several hundred conscripted laborers. Construction began in earnest. Considering the Pointe du Hoc unassailable from the sea because of its formidable cliffs, the Germans emplaced two belts of barbed wire and minefields fifty meters deep encircling the southern side of the promontory. They cut away vegetation clearing fields of fire to the coastal highway, thus positioning themselves to cut communications between what later became OMAHA and UTAH beaches. The first combat positions constructed were two 3.5 meter thick

steel reinforced concrete anti-aircraft bunkers. Pointe du Hoc was a prominent terrain feature frequently used as an identification point and over flown by Allied airmen. The anti-aircraft guns forced them to higher altitudes, complicating navigation in bad weather, and possibly would be able to pick off planes in trouble or low flying reconnaissance aircraft. Further construction put in six circular firing platforms for the 155mm guns, five protected bunkers (one an infirmary) for troops, three munitions bunkers, a command and control bunker, and communications trenches in such a manner that troops could travel between all of these positions without exposing themselves. Unfortunately for the Germans, construction delays caused by Allied bombardment and the French Resistance allowed them to construct only two of six artillery casemates planned for the site. On 6 June 1944 about a hundred artillerymen from the 2nd Battery of the 1260th Army Coast Artillery Battalion, commanded by Oberleutenant Brotkorb, and gun crews from the Luftwaffe's 32nd Flak Battalion manned Pointe du Hoc. These were soon reinforced by infantry companies from the 726th and 914th Grenadier Regiments.

## Intelligence Gathering

Intelligence is the comprehensive and complex process whereby information on the enemy and the battlefield environment is gathered and rendered useful. As D-Day approached the Allies collected intelligence from open (publicly available) sources, clandestine assets, reconnaissance, signal interception and decryption, and their own efforts to model the battlefield. France had been well traveled and was intimately familiar to many fighting amongst the Allies, and such open sources as newspapers, maps and travel guides were familiar as well. From these Allied planners knew the nature of the cliffs, the importance of the coastal road, and the probable tides and weather around Pointe du Hoc, for example. The French Resistance and agents working with them kept this information current, and added important details concerning enemy strengths, dispositions and facilities. After destructive bombings of the Pointe du Hoc in April and May, for example, the Resistance passed information that the Germans had hidden the big guns and replaced them with wooden dummies in their open firing emplacements. Reconnaissance increasingly relied upon aerial photography to remain timely, and such specialized planes as the F-5B

photo-reconnaissance aircraft frequented the pre-invasion battlefield. Perhaps the most notable photo-reconnaissance contribution to the success of D-Day was the careful tracking of German progress with respect to emplacing beach obstacles. From this information the Allies gained an accurate appreciation of when they should land with respect to the tide, and what it would take to open lanes for further traffic. Signal interception allowed the Allies to monitor the volume of radio traffic and occasionally locate sources with enough precision to destroy them, but the successful decryption of secret radio traffic proved far more valuable in the long run. Working out of the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) at Bletchley Park, British analysts cracked the encrypted codes of German Enigma and Lorenz Schlüsselzusatz machines. The highly protected results, code-named "Ultra", enabled them to read critical communications the Germans thought were secret. Corroborated by other sources, this information allowed them to determine the German order of battle in France, ascertain the relative strength and mobility of various units, and identify the potential for a counterattack reserve. This final consideration was critical, since Allied success depended upon linking together the beaches, relieving such isolated holdings as the Rangers on the Pointe du Hoc, and building up combat power before the Germans could mount an operationally significant counterattack. Allied planners relied upon mathematical models to help visualize operational requirements. An example was a study of Italian railroad degradation under bombardment by Professor S. Zuckerman, a scientific advisor to the Allied Expeditionary Air Force (AEAF). His findings informed the debate concerning resources to be committed to the pre-invasion rail interdiction campaign. Rail interdiction severely reduced construction supplies arriving in Normandy, with such results as only two of six casemates envisioned for the Pointe du Hoc being constructed by D-Day. Pulling together information from open sources, clandestine assets, reconnaissance, signal interception and decryption, and mathematical models, the Allies put together a surprisingly complete – albeit not perfect -- intelligence picture that served them well at the Pointe du Hoc and throughout the Normandy Campaign.

## Reconnaissance

As D-Day approached, Allied intelligence agencies worked multiple sources to gain as clear a picture as they could of the challenges they faced. These sourc-

es included active reconnaissance by naval, clandestine and air elements. Submarines and light patrol craft were frequent visitors to the French coastline, evading air and surface interception to reconnoiter and photograph enemy facilities and dispositions. Occasionally commandoes and frogmen participated in such reconnaissance efforts as well. British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) agents parachuted into France, linked up with counterparts from the French Resistance, and maintained contact with headquarters in London through Type B Mark II radio relays. The SOE/OSS initiative was codenamed "Jedburgh", featured multi-national teams of French and British or American officers, and established liaisons for gathering information and sustaining guerrillas in the field. As Allied air forces became increasingly supreme in the skies over France, aerial reconnaissance – particularly photo reconnaissance – became a dominant means for gathering timely information. Perhaps the most famous example of aircraft converted to this purpose was the modification of 200 Lockheed P-38J airframes in production to produce F-5B photo-reconnaissance aircraft. The F-5B replaced weapons with extra fuel and an advanced "trimetrigon" camera capable of establishing fields of view suitable for mapping and precisely identifying locations. The so-called "dicing" camera produced shots so quickly the plane could fly as low as fifty feet to get high resolution, yet the footage could be mathematically recombined into a sensible whole for establishing geographical relationships. Hundreds of other planes were modified in the field to serve as photo-reconnaissance aircraft or to produce photographs as a collateral mission. These capabilities became crucial as the Allies refined their plans and timing for the amphibious assault. On 20 February 1944 air photo-reconnaissance for the first time confirmed German anti-landing obstacles built below the high water mark on several French beaches. To breach the obstacles without exposing landing craft to underwater rupture suggested landing short of the obstacles at a lower tide level, but the further out one landed the more open beach the troops would have to cross to reach cover. The Germans were building their obstacles from the high water mark outwards, not wanting to ever have a situation where Allied landing craft could simply float over the top of them. Photo-reconnaissance and other sources focused on German progress in constructing the beach obstacles as a priority. By the middle of May the obstacles were still eight feet above low water, leading planners to conclude landing three hours before high water would be optimal. In the case of

the Pointe du Hoc, where the Germans relied upon the cliffs rather than beach obstacles, this timing gave the Rangers somewhat more beach to cross.

## Pre-Invasion Bombing

Preparations for Operation OVERLORD included an extensive bombing campaign. The strategic Combined Bomber Offensive, beginning in 1942, targeted the German industrial base initially. As D-Day drew nearer, it focused on the Luftwaffe (German Air Force), determined to secure air supremacy before the troops came ashore. Allied tactical bombing targeted Luftwaffe planes, airfields and facilities, and strategic bombing hit factories associated with aircraft production. The introduction of long range fighters fueled from add-on wing tanks beginning in late 1943 greatly extended the depths to which fighters could escort bombers. Allied seizure of airfields in Italy greatly extended their scope of operations in Germany. Large-scale raids on psychologically important targets, particularly Berlin, were designed to draw the Luftwaffe into decisive battle. In February 1944 the focused campaign against the Luftwaffe reached a tipping point, and by June Allied air supremacy over Western Europe was complete. Sustaining pressure on the Luftwaffe and German industry in general, Allied air forces turned their attention to isolating the Normandy battlefield and degrading German surface communications, especially rail. Marshalling yards and rail facilities were bombed, and locomotives and trains strafed. French rail capacity had already been significantly degraded by German confiscations to support their operations elsewhere, and now active sabotage and passive resistance complimented the Allied air campaign to disrupt German preparations. By the end of May all of the Seine River bridges north of Paris were closed to rail traffic, and traffic across the rest of the Seine, the Eure and the Loire Rivers was seriously degraded. Construction of Hitler's "Atlantic Wall" and other defensive preparations fell behind. Of 240 rail carloads of cement en route to one German corps sector during May, for example, only 47 arrived. In addition to this effort at strangulation, the Allied preparatory campaign did include some direct bombardment of coastal defenses. The Allies were careful not to compromise secrecy, however. During the final months they committed ten percent of their bombing to coastal defenses, and directed two bombs outside of the invasion area for each bomb within it. Even

this small proportion had significant effects. On Pointe du Hoc, for example, air strikes on 25 April, 21 and 22 May, and 4 and 5 June killed and wounded personnel, damaged and destroyed equipment, and delayed construction. By 8 May 30,000 Organization Todt civilian laborers left bedeviled construction on the Atlantic Wall to repair railroads instead. As D-Day approached the Allies had air supremacy, German defenses were far less formidable than planned, German access to the battlefield was seriously degraded, and Allied plans were set for a surprise assault after a brief pre-invasion bombardment.

## The French Resistance

In addition to thousands of Frenchmen who escaped overseas to fight alongside the British, Americans and other Allies in Africa, Italy and elsewhere, many others remaining within France cooperated with or joined the French Resistance. By the end of 1943 more than sixty Resistance networks with over 30,000 core members operated across France, and these grew to be an underground army of 200,000 by D-Day. The Resistance gathered intelligence, spirited downed Allied fliers to safety, and sabotaged German communications and preparations. With great effort and large investments of military manpower the Germans quarantined areas within fifty kilometers of the Atlantic coast. Within this zone Resistance operations consisted largely of gathering intelligence, feeding it to counterparts overseas directly or in cooperation with such Allied agencies as the British Special Air Service (SAS) or the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS). For example, in the aftermath of an Allied bombing in May 1944 the Germans redeployed the guns on Pointe du Hoc and constructed wooden dummy guns in the former positions. This activity was observed by Andre Farina of the Centurie Resistance network. With movement restricted he passed the information along to a Jean Marion, who relayed it to Guillaume Mercader, a Resistance organizer in Bayeux. Mercader informed Eugene Meslin, who had surreptitious radio contact with intelligence operatives in London. Thus, working carefully and bit by bit around heightened German security, the Resistance poured invaluable information across the English Channel to Allied planners. Outside of the quarantined zone Resistance operations were more direct, particularly with respect to isolating the future battlefield and hindering German preparations – a task the Resistance shared with Allied



air forces. Within the first three months of 1944, for example, the Resistance destroyed 808 railroad locomotives and Allied bombing and strafing destroyed 387 more. Bridges, rail lines and communications facilities also came under attack. This sustained effort greatly impeded German preparations. Of 240 rail carloads of cement en route to one German corps sector during May, for example, only 47 arrived. Construction of Hitler's "Atlantic Wall" fell behind. Less than half of the casemates and covered gun emplacements proposed for Normandy were completed by D-Day. On Pointe du Hoc itself only two of six gun positions had casemates. Operations prior to D-Day reflected a race between Germans trying to emplace formidable fixed defenses and Allies trying to delay them in doing so. The results of this race largely favored the Allies, with huge consequences when the D-Day landings occurred.

Locate on the Map

155mm field cannon

The original German gun emplacements on Pointe du Hoc were circular open pits of World War I design that protected the gun from direct fire, and allowed it a 360 degree traverse that could be assisted by a rail mount. The design was nick-named a "kettle", or Kesselbettungen. At Pointe du Hoc the Germans put in six such positions, and equipped them with 155mm guns captured from the French in 1940. The specific model on site was the 155 GPF FILLoux, model K 418, with a range of 19.5 kilometers. The French had put it into service in 1917, and it had been adopted by other nations, including the United States. It had a barrel length of 5915mm, an intrinsic traverse range of 30 degrees each way and intrinsic elevation from 0 to +35 degrees. It fired explosive rounds with a muzzle velocity of 735 meters per second. As the Allies gained air superiority, the vulnerability of the kettle's open construction became increasingly apparent. This vulnerability was underscored by air attacks on the Pointe du Hoc in May 1944 that damaged several guns and gun positions. From that point the Germans put wooden dummy guns in the emplacements, and concealed the real guns further inland until better protected casemates could be constructed. When the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion seized Pointe du Hoc on 6 June, only two of the casemates were complete and the 155mm guns were still posi-



tioned inland.

## AA Guns

The first combat positions constructed on the Pointe du Hoc were two 3.5 meter thick steel reinforced concrete anti-aircraft bunkers. Pointe du Hoc was a prominent terrain feature frequently used as an identification point and flown over by Allied airmen. The anti-aircraft guns forced them to higher altitudes, complicating navigation in bad weather. The guns might be able to pick off planes in trouble or low flying reconnaissance aircraft. The anti-aircraft bunkers built on the Pointe du Hoc were in accordance with a standard design, Regelbau Luftwaffe 409A (RL409A). Standardization allowed for the incorporation of prefabrication, and assured newly assigned gunners would be immediately familiar with the features of their bunker. RL409A mounted a 20mm or a 37mm flak gun on its roof. It had two entrances, a gas lock, an ammunition room, a storage room, and crew quarters. In the case of the Pointe du Hoc, the weapons mounted were 37mm flak guns. Germany produced a series of 37 mm guns prior to and during World War II to serve as medium-caliber anti-aircraft guns. Unlike some other nations, the Germans not emphasize this class of weapon early on, anticipating that the success of their Luftwaffe would limit requirements for it. Thus their 37 mm anti-aircraft gun remained fairly rare until late in the war. The 3,7 cm Flak 43, mounted at the Pointe du Hoc, was a dramatic improvement over older models. A new gas-operated breech increased the firing rate to 250 RPM, while dropping the weight to 1247 kg. The weapon was also produced in a twin-gun mount, the 3,7 cm Flakzwillig 43, although this version was considered unwieldy and top-heavy. The Flak 37 could be found in some numbers mounted to the ubiquitous Sd. Kfz.7 or (later) the sKs. The newer Flak 43 was almost always used in a mobile mounting. The most famous of these were converted Panzer IV tanks, first as the "interim" Möbelwagen and later as the Ostwind - which was considered particularly deadly. The Flak 43 had more than double the firing rate of its closest Allied counterpart, the Bofors 40mm. It also could set up in smaller spaces, and was considerably lighter when considering the gun and mount together. Luckily for Allied aircrews, this fearsome weapon was put into mass production too late to have a major effect on the war effort.

## Ringstande (Tobruks)

Ubiquitous features of prepared German defenses were the Ringstande, often called “Tobruks” by the Allies since they first encountered such fortifications in fighting outside that city. The Ringstande were small concrete positions level with the ground with a circular opening in the roof. Here a man could stand upright with only his head and shoulders exposed. Ringstande offered 360 degree observation and generally served as positions for machine guns as well. Some Ringstande served as positions for even heavier weapons, like mortars. On Pointe du Hoc there were two self-standing Ringstande and five built into the personnel bunkers. Those built into the personnel bunkers not only served as fighting positions, but also allowed observers to determine when soldiers sheltering from bombardment should reoccupy their trench lines. On Pointe du Hoc the Ringstande were equipped with the Maschinengewehr 42 (MG-42). The MG-42 fired 50-round belts of 7.92mm ammunition at up to 1,200 rounds a minute. It could range beyond 2,000 meters when tripod mounted. At Pointe du Hoc it offered the Germans a potentially devastating means of defense.

## Observation and Command Bunker

The primary purpose of the German position on the Pointe du Hoc was to coordinate artillery fires and provide a firing platform for deadly 155mm guns. To be effective, these functions required a fire control center wherein targeting information could be processed and passed to the guns. To this purpose a Regelbau 636A (R636A) observation and command bunker was built at the tip of Pointe du Hoc, where it enjoyed vistas sweeping into what became OMAHA and UTAH beaches. The R636 featured an observation room, a communications center, crew quarters, and a platform for a range finder on its roof. The R636 bunker at Pointe du Hoc had a small wooden observation bunker associated with it built out even further on the point to accommodate dead space not visible from the primary bunker. This was destroyed by Allied bombardment. The Germans built a total of seventy R636 observation and command bunkers and thirty smaller R637 observation and command bunkers in France. Of these, none was more critically positioned than the one on the tip of the Pointe du Hoc.

## 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion

### World War II Combat Chronicle

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion activated on 1 April, 1943, in Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Rangers are highly trained volunteers, and Ranger battalions are intended for such specialized missions as scouting, screening, raiding, ambushing and spearheading attacks or invasions with assaults on key terrain. In World War II American Rangers were heavily influenced by British Commandos, and borrowed many tactics, techniques and procedures from them. In December, 1943, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion deployed to Bude, England, and prepared for participation in Operation OVERLORD.

On June 6, 1944 - D-Day - the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion attacked to seize the dominant cliff-bound Pointe du Hoc and destroy German heavy guns positioned there. The guns were positioned in such a manner that they could disrupt landings at both Omaha and Utah Beaches, and had the highest single priority for pre-invasion targets. Despite delay, disruption and casualties in getting ashore, the Rangers climbed up the cliff, in many cases assisted by rocket propelled ropes and rope ladders, while under fire and had parties on top within fifteen minutes. These formed up into ever larger groups as more and more men made it to the top, and moved on to designated targets. The guns had been moved from their initial prepared positions, but the Rangers nevertheless tracked them down and destroyed them. They pushed on to cut the coastal highway behind Pointe du Hoc, and beat back furious German counterattacks to secure their gains. Meanwhile a contingent of the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion and the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion had fought their way ashore onto Omaha Beach. In concert with the 29th Infantry Division and supporting units they fought their way overland, relieving the embattled defenders of Pointe du Hoc on 8 June.

After a period of security, reserve and retraining, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was attached to the 29th Infantry Division for the assault on Brest. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and the principal German submarine base in France. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was to secure the right flank of the 29th Infantry Division, seize the Lochrist Battery with its 280mm guns, and clear the Le Conquet Peninsula. After fierce fighting the battalion accom-

plished each of these objectives, at times in concert with the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). The fighting for Hill 63 was particularly savage, and the capture of the Lochrist Battery particularly daring.

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed into the tough fighting for the Hurtgen Forest. In a particularly noteworthy engagement it secured Bergstein and nearby Castle Hill (Hill 400), and then defended them against furious counterattacks while under heavy artillery fire. The battalion moved on to cross the Roer and the Rhine Rivers, and in concert with the 102nd Cavalry Group formed a combined arms force to cover the V Corps advance into Germany. When the war in Europe ended, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion had secured the major German maneuver area at Grafenwohr and pushed contingents into Czechoslovakia.

Seventy-six soldiers from the 2nd Ranger Infantry battalion are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission Cemeteries: thirty-nine in Normandy, twelve in Henri-Chapelle, twelve in the Netherlands, eleven in Brittany, and two in Cambridge. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion earned the Presidential Unit Citation, the French Croix de Guerre and the British Military Medal in World War II.

## 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion

### World War II Combat Chronicle

The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion activated on 1 September 1943 in Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Ranger battalions are all-volunteer, and designed for such specialized missions as scouting, screening, raiding, ambushing and spearheading assaults with attacks on key terrain. In World War II American Rangers were heavily influenced by British Commandos, and borrowed tactics, techniques and procedures from them. After intense training the battalion shipped to Leominster, England, and undertook further training in England and Scotland for its role in Operation OVERLORD.

On June 6, 1944 – D-Day – the 5th Ranger Battalion came ashore on Omaha Beach. Original plans were for it land at the Pointe du Hoc to reinforce the 2nd Ranger Battalion, but it diverted to Omaha when it did not receive a signal indicating the 2nd was successfully ashore by the appointed time. The 5th Ranger Battalion's alternate mission was to attack overland to secure the Pointe du

Hoc. German resistance on Omaha Beach was determined, and the American assault there pinned down. In this chaos Brigadier General Norman Cota of the 29th Infantry Division famously exclaimed "Rangers lead the way!" - now the Ranger motto -- and the embattled Rangers pressed forward under heavy fire as the vanguard of the advance off the beaches. The battalion broke through to seize Vierville on the first day. Beating back fierce German counterattacks, the 5th Ranger Battalion and accompanying units broke through to the Pointe du Hoc and relieved the hard pressed 2nd Rangers on June 8, then pushed on to Grandcamp and Isigny.

After absorbing replacements, retraining and security duties, the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed to the assault on Brest beginning 29 August. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and long the principal German submarine base in France. Ranger patrols swiftly probed outlying defenses, compromising German positions on the high ground around Brest. The Rangers screened difficult terrain between units as the noose around Brest tightened. In the grinding attack the Rangers were assigned some of the most formidable missions, seizing critical forts, pillboxes and positions in carefully coordinated combined arms assaults. In the savage fighting for Brest the battalion killed 624 and captured 2114, while suffering 137 casualties itself.

The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion secured the 12th Army Group Headquarters at Arlon, Belgium during October and November 1944, and then was attached to the Sixth Cavalry Group during savage fighting from Diesen to Ludweiler in Germany. During the German Ardennes Offensive the battalion defended St. Avold, and several times secured sectors over 10,000 meters across - appropriate to a division. In February 1945 the 5th Rangers crossed the Saar River, infiltrated behind German lines, and established a blocking position near Zerf to trap retreating enemy and block reinforcements. This precipitated a savage nine day battle that crushed enemy resistance in the area, opening a route to the Rhine. Once across the Rhine the battalion cleared assigned sectors, participated in the race to the Danube, and ended the war in Pocking, Germany. Sixty-seven Rangers from the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion are buried in American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries: twenty-three in Luxembourg, fourteen in Normandy, thirteen in Brittany, eleven in Lorraine, two in Epinal, and one each in the Ardennes, Cambridge, Henri-Chapelle and North Africa. The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion earned two Distinguished Unit Citations and the French Croix de Guerre during World War II.

## 116th Infantry Regiment

### World War II Campaign Chronicle

The 116th Infantry Regiment was a constituent unit of the 29th Infantry Division – the “Blue and Gray Division” – during World War II. The regiment traced its roots to Virginia Militia organized in 1742 that fought the French and Indians, and later the British during the American Revolution. During the Civil War this militia served under General Thomas J. Jackson in the famous “Stonewall” Brigade. During World War I it was reorganized into the 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division, and saw significant combat in France. In February 1941 the 116th Infantry Regiment and 29th Infantry Division, now National Guard, were called into Federal Service.

The 116th Infantry Regiment assault landed onto Omaha Beach on 6 June, 1944. Seas were choppy and cross currents strong. Many landing craft came ashore far from where they had intended. German resistance, supported by significant obstacles, was organized and determined. American units were intermingled, exposed and under heavy fire. Nevertheless the soldiers clawed their way onto bluffs overlooking the beaches and outflanked the draw at Vierville-sur-Mer, capable of passing vehicles to higher ground. The 116th pushed on with the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion and 743rd Tank Battalion to relieve the embattled 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion defending the critical Pointe du Hoc, captured in a daring assault up the cliffs from the sea. The 116th supported the attack that seized Isigny and closed to the Vire River. The 29th Infantry Division linked up with the 101st Airborne Division near Carentan on 10 June, and by 12 June Omaha and Utah Beaches were a continuous front behind which the American buildup continued.

The 116th Infantry Regiment pushed on through difficult bocage terrain and thickening German opposition towards the strategic town of St. Lo. The regiment participated in the fierce fighting to secure the Martinville Ridge, key terrain overlooking St. Lo. A battalion of the 116th pushed within 1,000 meters of the town on 15 July, but became cut off. A relieving battalion of the 116th commanded by Major Thomas D. Howie broke through to them, but Howie was killed when the combined units continued their advance. The 29th Infantry Division finally secured St. Lo on 18 July, and laid Howie’s flag-draped coffin on the rubble-buried pediment of Ste. Croix Church, a poignant symbol of cour-

age and sacrifice.

On 29 July, as the Operation COBRA breakout offensive sped towards Avranches and points beyond, the 29th Infantry Division with the 116th Infantry Regiment leading attacked along COBRA's left shoulder to broaden the offensive and secure its flank. Near Tessy-sur-Vire, Villebaudon and Percy the division collided with the German 2nd and 116th Panzer Divisions. These were the only significant German armored forces proximate to the breakthrough, and were rolling west in a desperate effort to plug the emerging gap. Instead the 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments tied them into a roiling mobile battle that ultimately favored the Americans.

The 116th Infantry Regiment secured Hill 219, high ground west of Vire, and then swept into that town using underbrush and ravines to cover their approach. After house to house fighting they secured Vire on 7 August. The regiment then joined in the destruction of German forces within the "Falaise Pocket", formed when General George S. Patton's Third Army encircled numerous enemy forces in the aftermath of COBRA. The 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments advanced as far as Tinchebray before being pinched out by British forces crossing its front as the pocket disappeared. The 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments redeployed to the Brittany Campaign and the attack on Brest, a base for German U-Boats that wreaked havoc on Allied shipping. Brest was heavily fortified and stoutly defended, requiring a prolonged and deliberate siege to secure. The 29th Infantry Division closed up on enemy defenses within its sector and launched a major attack on 25 August – the day other Allied forces liberated Paris. The 116th Infantry Regiment particularly distinguished itself in savage fighting for Fort Montbarey, employing tons of explosives and attached British flame-throwing "Crocodile" tanks to knock out enemy casemates. After further heavy fighting, Brest fell on 18 September.

The 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments redeployed over 200 miles to the German border. In October the 116th Infantry Regiment took part in fierce fighting around Aachen, the first German city to fall to the Allies. The division then pushed on to the Roer River, and held that line during the German Ardennes offensive from December through January 1945. The 29th Infantry Division forced the Roer and advanced through Munchen-Gladbach, and the 116th participated in mopping up the Ruhr Pocket in April. The 29th Infantry Division then pushed on to the Elbe River, and linked up with advanc-



ing Russian forces on 2 May. The division was deactivated from federal service and reactivated in a National Guard status in 1946.

The 116th Infantry Regiment earned two Presidential Unit Citations, a Meritorious Unit Citation and two French Croix de Guerre during World War II. A total of 786 of its World War II Soldiers are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries in Europe.

## 743rd Tank Battalion

### World War II Combat Chronicle

The triangular infantry division of World War II consisted of infantry regiments, artillery battalions, and the minimal representation from other branches it would consistently use. In demanding circumstances separate battalions of appropriate types reinforced it. The 743rd Tank Battalion was such a separate battalion, bringing the mobility, fire power and shock action of armor to the divisions it reinforced.

The 743rd Tank Battalion was attached to the 30th Infantry Division from 1 March 1944 through 23 June 1945, but was subordinated to the 29th Infantry Division 6-14 June and assaulted Omaha Beach on D-Day. Two of its companies had been equipped with amphibious duplex drive (DD) tanks, but its sister 741st Tank Battalion warned it of having lost many such tanks swamped in the rough seas. The 743rd landed by LST instead. The tanks proved invaluable in reducing German beachhead defenses, and many reinforced the Navy Special Engineer Task Forces clearing gaps through formidable obstacles. The battalion forced the draw at St. Laurent-sur-Mer, and its tanks led attacks inland from hotly contested Omaha Beach. Famously, the 743rd Tank Battalion formed the armored spearhead in the relief of Pointe du Hoc, critical terrain seized by the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion on D-Day and held by them for two days in the face of savage German counterattacks. The 743rd Tank Battalion won the Distinguished Unit Citation for its exemplary performance of duty on 6 June 1944.

Reunited with the 30th Infantry Division on 15 June, the 743rd Tank Battalion forced the Vire River and Taute-Vire Canal and seized the village of St. Jean-de-Daye. On 11 July a German armored division counter-attacked, but was beaten back in fierce close quarters fighting. The 743rd and 30th pressed on

to seize the ridgeline at Hauts-Vents and the bridge at Pont-Hebert, then led in the attack for Operation COBRA, the major breakout offensive. They followed up on devastating “carpet bombing” on 25 July to seize the village of Hebecrevon, secure bridges along the Vire River and clear routes for the passage of exploiting armored combat commands.

After seizing Troisgots and Tessy-sur-Vire, the 743rd and 30th redeployed to secure newly seized Mortain. They had barely arrived when the Germans launched a major counter-attack on 7 August, hoping to reach the sea at Avranches and cut off General George S. Patton’s rapidly advancing Third Army. The Americans doggedly held on to nearby Hill 314 and other key terrain. The 743rd lent its firepower to the determined infantrymen, and the German attack failed with heavy losses.

The 743rd and 30th captured Domfort as Allied forces trapped Germans in the Falaise “Pocket”, and closed another encirclement at Louviers along the Eure River. They secured Fort Eban Emael on 10 September, and advanced through Maastricht and Heerlen to attack the Siegfried Line. Penetrating it, they linked up with the 1st Infantry Division to encircle Aachen, and pressed on to the Inde River. On 17 December they redeployed to block the German Ardennes offensive through Malmedy and Stavelot, then counterattacked in January. They forced the Rhine on 24 March 1945, and rolled on through Hamelin, Braunschweig and Magdeburg to contact the Russians on 17 April.

Ninety-six Soldiers from the 743rd Tank Battalion are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries: thirty-two in Normandy, twenty-seven in the Netherlands, sixteen in Henri-Chapelle, ten in Cambridge, seven in Brittany, and one each in Lorraine, Luxembourg and the Rhone. Constituent units of the 743rd Tank Battalion earned two Meritorious Unit Citations.

## Naval Support in the Battle of Pointe du Hoc

Naval support proved crucial in the battle for Pointe du Hoc, first in getting the Rangers ashore, and then in providing them artillery fires. British Admiral Bertram H. Ramsay commanded the naval forces for Operation NEPTUNE—the naval component of the Normandy invasion. Under Ramsay in the direct chain of command were American Rear Admiral Alan G. Kirk, commanding

the Western Task Force designated to undertake the amphibious landings on the American beaches “Omaha” and “Utah,” and British Rear Admiral Philip L. Vian, the commander of the Eastern Task Force ordered to carry out the assaults on the British and Canadian beaches “Juno,” “Gold,” and “Sword.” Vessels committed to the operation included 1,213 naval combatants, 4,126 landing ships and craft, 736 ancillary ships and craft, and 864 merchant ships. The Western Task Force, responsible for Omaha Beach, supported the assault on Pointe du Hoc as well.

Rear Admiral Alan G. Kirk’s Western Task Force consisted of three components: Task Force 124, commanded by Rear Admiral John L. Hall, USN in the amphibious command ship USS Ancon, assigned to the assault on Omaha Beach; Task Force 125, commanded by Rear Admiral Don P. Moon, USN in the attack transport USS Bayfield, assigned to the assault on Utah Beach; and Task Force 126, the Follow-up Force commanded by Commodore Campbell D. Edgar, USN in the destroyer escort USS Maloy. Task Force 124 was responsible for Pointe du Hoc and convoyed the Rangers across the English Channel. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion embarked on the HMS Prince Charles, the SS Amsterdam and the SS Ben My Chree. The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion embarked on the HMS Prince Leopold, the HMS Prince Baudouin, and the SS Maud. The assault convoys reached their allotted sectors off the Normandy beaches before dawn on 6 June, despite squalls and high waves en route.

The landings on the Pointe du Hoc were scheduled to begin at 0630. German guns began firing at the American battleship Arkansas, the oldest battleship in the U.S. Navy, at 0530 and targeted American destroyers off Omaha five minutes later. Soon the American warships were returning fire. At 0550 the battleship USS Texas, the flagship of Rear Admiral Carleton F. Bryant, USN, the commander of the Omaha bombardment group, began her pre-landing naval gunfire. Aiming her 14-inch guns at the Pointe du Hoc, she sent huge chunks of rock from the cliff sailing into the air. The furious naval bombardment continued as the Rangers boarded their landing craft and sped to the beaches. Bombarding Force C, supporting Omaha Beach and the Pointe du Hoc landings, consisted of:

USS Texas (Battleship)

USS Arkansas (Battleship)

HMS Glasgow (Cruiser)

FFS Montcalm (French) (Cruiser)

FFS Georges Leygues (French) (Cruiser)

USS McCook (Destroyer)

USS Carmick (Destroyer)

USS Doyle (Destroyer)

USS Baldwin (Destroyer)

USS Harding (Destroyer)

USS Frankford (Destroyer)

USS Satterlee (Destroyer)

USS Thompson (Destroyer)

USS Emmons (Destroyer)

HMS Melbreak (Destroyer)

HMS Tanatside (Destroyer)

HMS Talybont (Destroyer)

The naval bombardment lifted and shifted at 0625 in anticipation of the Rangers coming ashore. Unfortunately the landing force had become misdirected en route to the Pointe du Hoc, and arrived over thirty minutes late. This afforded the Germans time to get out of bunkers they had weathered the bombardment in and back to firing positions on the cliffs. Sensing this danger, the destroyer USS Satterlee sped within two hundred yards of the shoreline and lashed the cliff tops with fire from her 5-inch and 40mm guns. This welcome fire support collaterally dropped portions of the cliffs to create talus mounds that some of the Rangers exploited in their climbs to the top. A joint Army-Navy fire-control party ashore with radio and signal lamp communications clambered up the cliffs with the Rangers, and quickly enhanced the discrimination and accuracy of the naval fires. The Satterlee destroyed a number of firing positions impeding the advance, and then helped the Rangers beat back fierce counterattacks. Other ships joined in this close up fire support off the Pointe du Hoc, and rotated as they exhausted their ammunition. The battle for the Pointe du Hoc raged for three days, notably supported by heavy and accurate fires from the USS Satterlee, Thompson, and Harding and from the HMS Talybont at important points. On 7 June welcome re-supplies arrived by LCVP, and casualties and prisoners were evacuated to the USS Texas on the same vessels. On 8 June a relief column fought its way in to the Pointe du Hoc from Omaha Beach. Throughout the battle for the Pointe du Hoc, naval support had proven essential to the success of the Rangers ashore.

## Casemates

By 1943 the Germans were uncomfortably aware of the vulnerability of their 155mm guns in open Kesselbettungen circular firing pits to air attack and indirect fires. They resolved to replace or supplement the pits with thickly walled enclosed concrete casemates for better protection. Casemates built on the Pointe du Hoc were to be in accordance with a standardized design, in this case Regelbau 679 (R679). Standardization allowed for the incorporation of prefabrication, and assured newly assigned gunners would be immediately familiar with the prominent features of their bunker. In the case of the R679 gun casemates at the Pointe du Hoc, prefabricated concrete blocks were integrated with poured concrete in the final design. Casemates did have the advantage of much improved protection, but restricted the field of fire to that allowed by the aperture. Should fighting be prolonged, the defense would be best served by having both casemates and firing pits available as options – since each had advantages depending upon the circumstances. Plans for the Pointe du Hoc envisioned six casemates and six firing pits, one of each for each of the guns. Only two of six casemates were complete by D-Day. The specific weapon on site envisioned for the casemates was the 155 GPF FIL-LOUX, model K 418, with a range of 19.5 kilometers. The French had put it into service in 1917, and it had been adopted by other nations, including the United States. It had a barrel length of 5915mm, an intrinsic traverse range of 30 degrees each way and intrinsic elevation from 0 to +35 degrees. It fired explosive rounds with a muzzle velocity of 735 meters per second.

## Mine field

The Germans anticipated an overland attack to seize the Pointe du Hoc, and laid a semi-circle of minefields fifty meters deep stretching from southeast of the anti-aircraft bunker on the east flank of the Pointe du Hoc to southwest of the anti-aircraft bunker on its west flank. Two belts of barbed wire backstopped the minefields and, with markings, kept German soldiers from inadvertently straying into them. The Germans had led in the development of landmine warfare. They mass produced the anti-tank Tellermine beginning in

1929. In 1935 they introduced the first purpose-built anti-personnel mine, the Schrapnellmine – also called the S-mine. When triggered a small charge propelled the Schrapnellmine a meter or two above the ground, and then its main detonation spewed 350 steel balls to a radius as great as 150 meters. Anglo-American soldiers named this fearsome device the “Bouncing Betty”. In 1942 the Germans added the smaller and simpler Schutzenmine (or Schu mine) to their inventory. This mine tended to blow off feet or lower legs without being immediately fatal, leaving Allied troops with the dilemma of disabled comrades lying in the middle of a minefield. The Germans deployed a mix of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines on feasible armored approaches, such as those into Pointe du Hoc from the south. They preferred a depth of sixteen rows offset at one to two meters apart. Prior to the introduction of the S-mine, unattended anti-personnel explosive devices had generally been booby-trapped artillery munitions. At the Pointe du Hoc such improvised explosive devices figured in the defense of the cliffs, where the Germans perceived less of a threat. Minen-granaten would simply fall off the cliffs and blow up if disturbed, whereas Rollminen were lashed to the cliffs with ropes that were to be cut at a propitious time to activate the device. German minefields and improvised explosive devices were substantially compromised by the intense naval bombardment, but nevertheless did inflict some casualties. Ironically, some of these were to Germans counterattacking the American Rangers after they had seized the Pointe du Hoc from the rear of the minefields.

Main road to Pointe du Hoc site

Small two-lane road out of Pointe du Hoc facing south towards the coastal highway. There were a number of small farm buildings in existence before D Day. These were heavily damaged during the fighting for Pointe du Hoc.

Pointe de la Percée

Pointe et Raz de la Percée is a point of land that lies about 2 kilometers west of Vierville-sur-Mer and 4.5 kilometers from Pointe du Hoc, and thus at the western end of Omaha Beach. The site was the objective of C Company of the

2nd Ranger Battalion as it was a German defensive strongpoint. This strongpoint deployed three artillery pieces that were positioned to fire on the landings Dog Green sector (Vierville Exit) of Omaha Beach. From the ocean, Pointe de la Percée, as it is commonly referred to, resembles Pointe du Hoc itself and thus contributed to the navigation error of the British escort guide boat ML304 (through the smoke and early morning light) that led the three companies of 2nd Battalion LCAs of Force A to head in a mistaken easterly direction. Col James Rudder in LCA888, the Ranger mission commander, noticed the error about 1000 meters from Pointe de la Percée and abruptly ordered the westerly course correction towards Pointe du Hoc. This error however, led to a 30 plus minute delay in the mission which had dire repercussions for the Ranger assault.

The plateau of Pointe de la Percée was also a German observation and radar site (two Seeriese Smoke 214, 1 FuMG Freya 80 and 1 Smoke 2 Seetakt) protected by 4 FLAK 20mm AA guns, and 5 MG42 machine guns in Tobruk emplacements. This radar site was believed to have been constructed in the spring of 1943.

A few days after D Day, on 8 June, the plateau was used by the American Ninth Air Force to construct an emergency fighter air strip. By 15 June, the 366th Fighter Group was using the 1500 meter airstrip to land its P38s for rearming and refueling in its support missions during the Normandy Campaign.

6 June, 0550: Naval Bombardment of the Pointe du Hoc

Naval bombardment of Pointe du Hoc begins, prominently featuring the fourteen-inch guns of the Battleship Texas. Plans now call for three companies of the 2nd Ranger Battalion led by Lt Col James Earl Rudder, to land on a narrow beach beneath the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc at 0630.

If they signal that they are successfully up the cliffs within a half hour, two more companies of the 2nd and the entire 5th Ranger Battalion led by Lt Col Max Schneider will follow and reinforce them. If not, these additional Rangers will instead land at OMAHA Beach and fight their way overland into Pointe du Hoc.



C Company of the 2nd Ranger Battalion has a separate mission, to knock out German strong points near Pointe de la Percée six and a half kilometers away and immediately flanking OMAHA Beach. The naval bombardment is scheduled to lift and shift inland at 0625.

## Naval bombardment

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## Battleship Texas

### USS Texas (BB-35)

The USS Texas was built by the Newport News Shipbuilding Company in Virginia and launched on May 18, 1912. She was commissioned on March 12, 1914. Her first training missions were along the coast of the United States from New England to Virginia.

When the United States entered the First World War in April 1917, the USS Texas was sent across the Atlantic to join the 6th Battle Squadron of Britain's Grand Fleet. During her service in the British fleet, the USS Texas did convoy missions with the occasional job of reinforcing the British Squadron's blockade in the North Sea. She continued these tasks until the armistice was signed with Germany on November 11, 1918. On March 9, 1919, the USS Texas became the first American battleship to carry an airplane. She also had the distinction of being the "flight deck" of the first aircraft to fly off of a ship. Lt. Comdr. Edward McDonnell flew a British-built Sopwith off the ship, once again entering the history books. Another first was when the Texas acted as a plane guard and navigational reference for the first transatlantic flight by a seaplane. During the interwar years of the 1920s, the USS Texas completed many training maneuvers and enjoyed a major overhaul and modernization in the Norfolk Navy Yard in 1925. She changed from coal to oil fired boilers. In 1927, the USS

Texas had the honor of becoming the flagship of the American fleet. In January of the following year, she carried President Herbert Hoover to the Pan-American conference in Havana, Cuba. Her history of firsts continued when the U.S. Navy installed the first commercial radar system on a warship in 1939. 1940 saw the USS Texas designated as the U.S. Atlantic Fleet's flagship and the following year, the First Marine Division was founded aboard her.

During that same year, 1941, she was continually stalked by German submarine U-203 while carrying out her duties on "Neutrality Patrols." After Pearl Harbor the USS Texas escorted Atlantic convoys protecting them from German raiders and U boat wolf packs. General Eisenhower's first "Voice of Freedom" broadcast was transmitted in 1942 from the Texas, which then participated in the invasion of North Africa, "Operation Torch" by providing gun support to the amphibious assault. It was during this time the Texas put a soon to be famous war correspondent, Walter Cronkite, ashore to begin his career.

On June 6th, 1944, the USS Texas played a major role in providing naval artillery support with her prominent 14-inch main guns. Her massive firepower was devastating to the German defensive bunker positions at Omaha beach, Utah Beach and Pointe du Hoc, and greatly assisted the landings on Omaha beach. The Texas participated in the attack on Cherbourg after D Day and she was hit twice by German coastal defense artillery during the bombardment. Although losing one crewmen and having thirteen others wounded when a 280-millimeter shell hit her fire control tower, she was quickly repaired and reentered the war by shelling Nazi positions for the Allied Invasion in Southern France. In September of 1944 the USS Texas was transferred to the Pacific for fleet duty including gunfire support for military landings at both Iwo Jima and Okinawa. She stayed in the Pacific lending continued support until the end of hostilities in August of 1945. When the war ended the Texas started her missions as a troop carrier by bringing home American troops.

In February 1946 the USS Texas began preparations for deactivation and moved to Baltimore, Maryland where she stayed until 1948. With so many of the battleships having suffered the sad fate of being scrapped or sunk by the United States Government, the school children of Texas decided to have a penny drive to attempt to buy the ship. This drive was successful and on April 21, 1948 the Battleship Texas became the first battleship memorial museum in the U.S. That same year, on the anniversary of Texas Independence, the Texas was presented to the State of Texas and commissioned as the flagship of the Texas

Navy. In 1983, the Texas was placed under the stewardship of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and is permanently anchored on the Buffalo Bayou and the busy Houston Ship Channel.

Three companies of the 2nd Ranger Battalion

2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion

World War II Combat Chronicle

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion activated on 1 April, 1943, in Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Rangers are highly trained volunteers, and Ranger battalions are intended for such specialized missions as scouting, screening, raiding, ambushing and spearheading attacks or invasions with assaults on key terrain. In World War II American Rangers were heavily influenced by British Commandos, and borrowed many tactics, techniques and procedures from them. In December, 1943, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion deployed to Bude, England, and prepared for participation in Operation OVERLORD.

On June 6, 1944 - D-Day - the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion attacked to seize the dominant cliff-bound Pointe du Hoc and destroy German heavy guns positioned there. The guns were positioned in such a manner that they could disrupt landings at both Omaha and Utah Beaches, and had the highest single priority for pre-invasion targets. Despite delay, disruption and casualties in getting ashore, the Rangers, assisted by rocket propelled ropes and rope ladders, climbed the cliffs while under fire and had parties on top within fifteen minutes. These formed up into ever larger groups as more and more men made it to the top, and moved on to designated targets. The guns had been moved from their initial prepared positions, but the Rangers nevertheless tracked them down and destroyed them. They pushed on to cut the coastal highway behind Pointe du Hoc, and beat back furious German counterattacks to secure their gains. Meanwhile a contingent of the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion and the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion had fought their way ashore onto Omaha Beach. In concert with the 29th Infantry Division and supporting units they fought their way overland, relieving the embattled defenders of Pointe du Hoc on 8 June.

After a period of security, reserve and retraining, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was attached to the 29th Infantry Division for the assault on Brest. Brest

was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and the principal German submarine base in France. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was to secure the right flank of the 29th Infantry Division, seize the Lochrist Battery with its 280mm guns, and clear the Le Conquet Peninsula. After fierce fighting the battalion accomplished each of these objectives, at times in concert with the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). The fighting for Hill 63 was particularly savage, and the capture of the Lochrist Battery particularly daring.

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed into the tough fighting for the Hurtgen Forest. In a particularly noteworthy engagement it secured Bergstein and nearby Castle Hill (Hill 400), and then defended them against furious counterattacks while under heavy artillery fire. The battalion moved on to cross the Roer and the Rhine Rivers, and in concert with the 102nd Cavalry Group formed a combined arms force to cover the V Corps advance into Germany. When the war in Europe ended, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion had secured the major German maneuver area at Grafenwohr and pushed contingents into Czechoslovakia.

Seventy-six soldiers from the 2nd Ranger Infantry battalion are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission Cemeteries: thirty-nine in Normandy, twelve in Henri-Chapelle, twelve in the Netherlands, eleven in Brittany, and two in Cambridge. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion earned the Presidential Unit Citation, the French Croix de Guerre and the British Military Medal in World War II.

#### Lt Col James Earl Rudder

James Earl Rudder was born on 6 May 1910 in Eden, Texas. The son of a farmer and one of six boys, he exhibited strong values from the start. He was an ardent football player during his youth and throughout college, and fully appreciated the importance of teamwork and determination. Rudder received a Bachelor of Science degree in 1932 from Texas A & M University, and enlisted in the United States Army Reserve. He was commissioned a second lieutenant of infantry. Rudder stayed close to home, working as a teacher and football coach at nearby Brady High School, and later at John Tarleton Agricultural College (part of the Texas A & M system) and then at Texas A & M University itself. In 1941, James Rudder was called to active duty and promoted to first

lieutenant. He rose through the ranks, and eventually assumed command of the 2nd Ranger Battalion and achieved lieutenant colonel. "Big Jim," as some called him, asserted leadership and discipline the Rangers had theretofore been lacking. Drawing on methods he had employed as a football coach, Rudder made necessary personnel changes swiftly, executed a thoughtful reorganization, and conducted a physically and psychologically rigorous training regime.

The 2nd Rangers' D-Day mission was to scale the 100-foot cliffs at Pointe du Hoc, eliminate the German guns, capture the fortifications and cut the nearby coastal road. Whoever held the Pointe du Hoc would have direct observation into both Omaha and Utah Beaches, an invaluable advantage that well might determine the overall success of the invasion. Rudder was not supposed to be on LCA 888, the first landing craft to touch the beach below the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc. He was now commander the Ranger Group, and thus of both the 2nd and 5th Ranger Battalions. He was supposed to go ashore in the second wave with Lieutenant Colonel Max Schneider's 5th Ranger Battalion and his own Force C. An incident the evening before D-Day changed that. Rudder found himself compelled to relieve the commander of Force A (Companies D, E and F of the 2 Ranger Battalion, designated to lead the assault on Pointe du Hoc) after a drunken incident aboard the ship Ben My Chree. Rudder committed to personally lead the companies of Force A ashore at Pointe du Hoc. Direct communications with the USS Ancon, his D Day command ship, and the commanding officer of the 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division (the unit the Rangers were attached to), Colonel Charles Canham, he left to others.

"No soldier in my command has ever been wished a more difficult task than that which befell the 34-year-old commander of this Ranger force," said General Omar Bradley, commander of United States Army forces in Europe at the time. The 2nd Rangers hit the cliffs at 0708 and without delay began to scale Pointe du Hoc. The casualty rate in the subsequent two-day battle was over 50 percent. Colonel Rudder himself was wounded twice during the course of fighting. Notwithstanding the hardships, the Rangers seized the Pointe du Hoc against all odds. After D-Day, Rudder was promoted to full colonel and commanded the 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. This unit would serve a vital role in the Battle of the Bulge.



One of the most decorated soldiers of the war, Rudder's honors include the Distinguished Service Cross, Legion of Merit and Silver Star. After the war, Rudder returned to Texas to work at Texas A & M University, serving as president of the school from 1959 to 1970, and as president of the entire Texas A & M University system from 1965 to 1970. He remained in the United States Army Reserve, and was promoted to Brigadier General in 1954 and Major General in 1957. In 1967 President Lyndon B. Johnson bestowed the Distinguished Service Medal, the highest peacetime service award, upon him. He was inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame in 1992, its inaugural year. Colonel Rudder passed away in Texas on 23 March 1970. He remains remembered in an annual commemorative service held in his honor in Normandy. President Ronald Reagan said of him, "In fifteen major campaigns and countless engagements, raids and battles, you [Rudder] established a reputation second to none. Your bravery became legendary as you met and overcame each of the formidable enemy forces that you faced. There are no words to express what I and your fellow countrymen feel for you and your magnificent record of valor. It stands as one of the greatest achievements in the annals of all military history."

## Narrow Beach

The 30-meter strip of rocky beach on the east side of Pointe du Hoc between the water and cliffs was the planned landing zone for the 2nd Ranger Battalion.

## 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion

### World War II Combat Chronicle

The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion activated on 1 September 1943 in Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Ranger battalions are all-volunteer, and designed for such specialized missions as scouting, screening, raiding, ambushing and spearheading assaults with attacks on key terrain. In World War II American Rangers were heavily influenced by British Commandos, and borrowed tactics, tech-

niques and procedures from them. After intense training the battalion shipped to Leominster, England, and undertook further training in England and Scotland for its role in Operation OVERLORD.

On June 6, 1944 - D-Day - the 5th Ranger Battalion came ashore on Omaha Beach. Original plans were for it land at the Pointe du Hoc to reinforce the 2nd Ranger Battalion, but it diverted to Omaha when it did not receive a signal indicating the 2nd was successfully ashore by the appointed time. The 5th Ranger Battalion's alternate mission was to attack overland to secure the Pointe du Hoc. German resistance on Omaha Beach was determined, and the American assault there pinned down. In this chaos Brigadier General Norman Cota of the 29th Infantry Division famously exclaimed "Rangers lead the way!" - now the Ranger motto -- and the embattled Rangers pressed forward under heavy fire as the vanguard of the advance off the beaches. The battalion broke through to seize Vierville on the first day. Beating back fierce German counterattacks, the 5th Ranger Battalion and accompanying units broke through to the Pointe du Hoc and relieved the hard pressed 2nd Rangers on June 8, then pushed on to Grandcamp and Isigny.

After absorbing replacements, retraining and security duties, the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed to the assault on Brest beginning 29 August. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and long the principal German submarine base in France. Ranger patrols swiftly probed outlying defenses, compromising German positions on the high ground around Brest. The Rangers screened difficult terrain between units as the noose around Brest tightened. In the grinding attack the Rangers were assigned some of the most formidable missions, seizing critical forts, pillboxes and positions in carefully coordinated combined arms assaults. In the savage fighting for Brest the battalion killed 624 and captured 2114, while suffering 137 casualties itself.

The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion secured the 12th Army Group Headquarters at Arlon, Belgium during October and November 1944, and then was attached to the Sixth Cavalry Group during savage fighting from Diesen to Ludweiler in Germany. During the German Ardennes Offensive the battalion defended St. Avold, and several times secured sectors over 10,000 meters across - appropriate to a division. In February 1945 the 5th Rangers crossed the Saar River, infiltrated behind German lines, and established a blocking position near Zerf to trap retreating enemy and block reinforcements. This precipitated a savage nine day battle that crushed enemy resistance in the area, opening a route to

the Rhine. Once across the Rhine the battalion cleared assigned sectors, participated in the race to the Danube, and ended the war in Pocking, Germany. Sixty-seven Rangers from the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion are buried in American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries: twenty-three in Luxembourg, fourteen in Normandy, thirteen in Brittany, eleven in Lorraine, two in Epinal, and one each in the Ardennes, Cambridge, Henri-Chapelle and North Africa. The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion earned two Distinguished Unit Citations and the French Croix de Guerre during World War II.

### Lt Col Max Schneider

Max F. Schneider, born 8 September 1912, grew up in Shenandoah, Iowa, and enlisted in the United States Army at an early age. He served in the Iowa National Guard during the 1930s and was commissioned a second lieutenant in September 1939. After being called to active duty in February 1941, he served with the 1st Ranger Battalion in 1942, commanding the battalion's E ("Easy") Company in North Africa. Schneider also served as executive officer of the 4th Ranger Battalion in Sicily and Italy. He gained extensive experience with amphibious operations in Africa and the Mediterranean, and would be an invaluable addition to the 2nd Ranger Battalion, the unit designated to scale the 100-foot cliffs at Pointe du Hoc on D-Day. Col. Schneider, however, would only serve briefly with the 2nd Rangers, first as a company commander and then as the battalion executive officer, second in command to Lieutenant Colonel James Earl Rudder. In the spring of 1944 Schneider took command of the 5th Ranger Battalion, and was soon promoted to lieutenant colonel himself. The D-Day mission of the 5th Ranger Battalion would be to reinforce the 2nd Ranger Battalion and help destroy the 155mm guns and capture the fortifications on the Pointe du Hoc.

The 2nd Rangers were to secure the Pointe du Hoc as quickly as possible on D-Day, and Schneider's 5th Ranger Battalion was to rapidly reinforce them should they be successfully ashore. If he did not receive the signal indicating a successful landing on Pointe du Hoc by H+30 (0700), Schneider was to land his men on Omaha Beach alongside the 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division. The 2nd Rangers were delayed in getting ashore, and Schneider received the signal to proceed to Omaha. As his flotilla neared the

beach, Schneider made a key tactical decision to land farther east than originally intended in an area less susceptible to German artillery fire he observed devastating Company C of the 116th. His decision saved lives. Of the 450 Rangers Schneider led ashore, including two companies of the 2nd Ranger Battalion in addition to the Rangers of the 5th, only 6 became casualties on the beach. Landing at 0740, Schneider's troops found themselves at the right place at the right time, possessing the strength necessary to push the invasion beyond the beaches in their sector. Here General Norman D. Cota, Assistant Division Commander of the 29th Infantry Division, gave the order that has since become the famous Ranger motto: "Rangers lead the way."

Rangers, elite American light infantry special operations forces trained to press the initiative under fire, successfully broke out of the beachhead at Normandy, embodying the leadership and valor they have long been remembered for. The battle was far from over as they left the beach. Col. Schneider's men fought for 2 days more before they were able to relieve Rudder's 2nd Rangers, who had in fact been successful, although delayed, in seizing Pointe du Hoc.

Lt. Col. Max Schneider's honors include the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star, and Purple Heart. Schneider was an esteemed combat leader and remained in the Army, becoming a full colonel in April 1953. Schneider died while on active duty in Korea in March 1959. Epitomizing the ethos of a United States Army Ranger, he is now remembered for tactical brilliance and outstanding courage that contributed to the Allied success at Normandy. In 1992, he was inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame in its inaugural year.

### German strong points near Pointe de la Percée

Pointe et Raz de la Percée is a point of land that lies about 2 kilometers west of Vierville-sur-Mer and 4.5 kilometers from Pointe du Hoc, and thus at the western end of Omaha Beach. The site was the objective of C Company of the 2nd Ranger Battalion as it was a German defensive strongpoint. This strongpoint deployed three artillery pieces that were positioned to fire on the landings Dog Green sector (Vierville Exit) of Omaha Beach. From the ocean, Pointe de la Percée, as it is commonly referred to, resembles Pointe du Hoc itself

and thus contributed to the navigation error of the British escort guide boat ML304 (through the smoke and early morning light) that led the three companies of 2nd Battalion LCAs of Force A to head in a mistaken easterly direction. Col James Rudder in LCA888, the Ranger mission commander, noticed the error about 1000 meters from Pointe de La Percée and abruptly ordered the westerly course correction towards Pointe du Hoc. This error however, led to a 30 plus minute delay in the mission which had dire repercussions for the Ranger assault.

The plateau of Pointe de la Percée was also a German observation and radar site (two Seeriese Smoke 214, 1 FuMG Freya 80 and 1 Smoke 2 Seetakt) protected by 4 FLAK 20mm AA guns, and 5 MG42 machine guns in Tobruk emplacements. This radar site was believed to have been constructed in the spring of 1943.

A few days after D Day, on 8 June, the plateau was used by the American Ninth Air Force to construct an emergency fighter air strip. By 15 June, the 366th Fighter Group was using the 1500 meter airstrip to land its P38s for re-arming and refueling in its support missions during the Normandy Campaign.

## Machine guns

MG-42 The German Maschinengewehr 42 was machine gun which fired 7.92mm rounds in 50 round belts up to 1,200 rounds per minute. Mounted on a tripod, hand held on a bipod or in a Tobruk, the MG-42 was a devastating defensive weapon. At Pointe du Hoc there were two fixed machine gun posts that would have been equipped with this weapon.

Tobruks were the most common type of fortified position along the Normandy coast, and existed in a wide range of styles. Officially termed “Ringstanden”, they were characterized by a single circular opening for a weapon.

## Barbed wire

Barbed wire was deployed in multiple strands or rolls to impede movement, complement other obstacles and shape fields of fire. When deployed on the near side of a minefield, it served to keep defending troops out of the minefield while containing attacking troops within it. The Rangers, attacking Pointe du Hoc from the rear of its principal defenses, reversed this relationship -- to their own advantage.

Sgt. Leonard Lomell, D Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

I happened to be looking at the Texas, Battleship Texas, when she let go of salvo shells from her deck guns. And I was at such an angle, I was surprised to see the ship move back from the backlash of the firing of their deck guns.

Sgt. Frank South, HQ Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

It was, it was a, a shock that these. It was a cataclysmic sound of these big guns firing. And when I looked back over the horizon when I could, it was an awesome, awesome sight to see, this wall of steel coming in and along the shore. I couldn't understand how they could survive, anybody knowing how much hell those things could cause, could raise. Those big guns firing was a memorable event in our lives.

Cpt. John Raaen Jr., HQ Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

We were abeam the Texas, I would guess a thousand yards maybe, and the Texas opened up. Sullivan and I were both sitting down on the benches at that time and when that terrible roar, I don't know how to describe it, it was the loudest noise I've ever heard, and both of us jumped up and I guess all the enlisted men did too. And the sub-lieutenant, who was the officer in charge of the section and of the LCA, he just kindly looked down and said, "Sirs, that's the Battleship Texas opening up the bombardment of the coast." Every other ship opened up right after the Texas, there was just nothing but a constant

rolling noise of cannon shot.

#### 6 June, 0615: Amphibious Movement

Companies F, D and E of the 2nd Ranger Battalion are in their LCAs (landing craft assault) for 3 hours moving to Pointe du Hoc.

High seas, equipment failure, poor visibility, and an eastward setting tidal current have caused misdirection. The landing team is heading east to Pointe de la Percée and will experience over a half an hour delay. 1000 meters from shore the navigation error is detected and a hard course change made. The LCAs transporting the Rangers turn westward and speed through flanking fire parallel to the beach.

The delay has meant that it has now been more than thirty minutes since the naval bombardment lifted, and the Germans have come out of their bunkers and reoccupied fighting positions.

#### F, D and E of the 2nd Ranger Battalion

##### 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion

##### World War II Combat Chronicle

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On June 6, 1944 – D-Day – the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion attacked to seize the dominant cliff-bound Pointe du Hoc and destroy German heavy guns positioned there. The guns were positioned in such a manner that they could disrupt landings at both Omaha and Utah Beaches, and had the highest single



priority for pre-invasion targets. Despite delay, disruption and casualties in getting ashore, the Rangers, assisted by rocket propelled ropes and rope ladders, climbed the cliffs while under fire and had parties on top within fifteen minutes. These formed up into ever larger groups as more and more men made it to the top, and moved on to designated targets. The guns had been moved from their initial prepared positions, but the Rangers nevertheless tracked them down and destroyed them. They pushed on to cut the coastal highway behind Pointe du Hoc, and beat back furious German counterattacks to secure their gains. Meanwhile a contingent of the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion and the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion had fought their way ashore onto Omaha Beach. In concert with the 29th Infantry Division and supporting units they fought their way overland, relieving the embattled defenders of Pointe du Hoc on 8 June.

After a period of security, reserve and retraining, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was attached to the 29th Infantry Division for the assault on Brest. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and the principal German submarine base in France. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was to secure the right flank of the 29th Infantry Division, seize the Lochrist Battery with its 280mm guns, and clear the Le Conquet Peninsula. After fierce fighting the battalion accomplished each of these objectives, at times in concert with the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). The fighting for Hill 63 was particularly savage, and the capture of the Lochrist Battery particularly daring.

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed into the tough fighting for the Hurtgen Forest. In a particularly noteworthy engagement it secured Bergstein and nearby Castle Hill (Hill 400), and then defended them against furious counterattacks while under heavy artillery fire. The battalion moved on to cross the Roer and the Rhine Rivers, and in concert with the 102nd Cavalry Group formed a combined arms force to cover the V Corps advance into Germany. When the war in Europe ended, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion had secured the major German maneuver area at Grafenwohr and pushed contingents into Czechoslovakia.

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tary Medal in World War II.

### LCAs transporting the Rangers

The Rangers were in LCA boats manned by British seamen. The Rangers had trained with British. The LCA was built in England on the basic design of Andrew Higgins's boat, but the British added some light armor to the sides and gunwales. That made the LCA slower and heavier -- the British were sacrificing mobility to increase security -- which meant that the LCA rode lower in the water than the LCVP.

### Fighting positions

The German defenses on Pointe du Hoc were intended to protect personnel from air and naval bombardment, and to secure the site against ground assault. The Germans believed the cliffs surrounding the site were so formidable that an assault over them would be impractical, and that a ground assault would have to progress overland from nearby beaches or airheads. Two formidable anti-aircraft artillery bunkers and numerous machineguns on Pointe du Hoc rendered a direct airborne assault too dangerous. German troops not already manning emplaced weapons or observation posts envisioned weathering preliminary air and naval bombardment in five personnel bunkers, one of which was equipped to double as a hospital bunker. Three purpose-built ammunition bunkers would protect this vital supply. Meanwhile, heavy artillery and anti-aircraft artillery would engage Allied ships and planes from their own casemates and bunkers. The personnel bunkers were fitted with Ringestande, or "Tobruks", which provided covered positions from which machine gunners could fire and observe enemy movements. When the bombardment lifted or shifted and ground combat seemed imminent, infantrymen were to pour out of the bunkers into trench lines that connected all of the positions on the Pointe du Hoc together. Barbed wire encircled the Pointe du Hoc, and fifty meter thick minefields covered the probable ground approaches from the south. Entrenched infantrymen supported by heavy machinegun fire could hold off the ground attack while casemated guns pummeled the Allied fleet. The actual

course of events departed from this defensive scenario for two reasons. First, Allied Air Force and French Resistance interdiction of the battlefield prior to D-Day had delayed construction to the point that only two of six casemates for the 155mm guns were complete. Second, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion did attack the Pointe du Hoc over the cliffs.

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## Sgt. Leonard Lomell, D Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

I remember the spray coming over the bow of the landing craft. It was a rough sea and it would spray over and some water would get into the boat itself and the rest of us would get sprayed with seawater. Some bailed with their helmets, fearful that we'd take on too much water and sink, which some boats did.

Sgt. Antonio Ruggiero, D Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

I got in the boat and when we started off, it was rough, the water was rough, and it was cold. We got within, I would say, we could almost see the guys trying to get up the side of the cliffs, when we went down. The boat just went like that. Over two hours we were in the water, and we started drawing artillery shells coming right in close. Every time one of them things went off, you could feel it. As luck would have it, after two hours, a navy gunboat, which is not too big, was coming. We could see it heading towards us. We started screaming, you know, and we kept drifting, drifting. But this gunboat was coming closer and closer and when we got there close enough they spotted us and they started picking us up. When they finally had us all, there was eleven of us that they picked up, the rest were gone.

Sgt. Frank South, HQ Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

We were following a royal navy lead boat who was supposed to guide us, but their navigation system was faulty. We were headed towards Pointe de la Percée instead of Pointe du Hoc. Rudder noticed the error, and ordered them to correct the heading. That meant that in these rough seas, we would have to go alongside the cliffs of the channel, and on the way in we picked up small arms fire, machine guns and such.

6 June, 0708: Rangers Land at Pointe du Hoc

Companies F, D and E of the 2nd Ranger Battalion land along the eastern face of Pointe du Hoc. LCA 888 is the first to land. It contains Lt. Col Rudder, his command group, Rangers from Easy Company and others from headquarters company.

Craters on the rocky beach below the cliffs from weeks of bombardment impede a clean landing on the 30-meter strip of beach but conversely provide

cover once the Rangers are ashore. Grenades, rifles and machine guns rake the beach.

Destroyers, most notably the USS Satterlee and HMS Talybont, swing in dangerously close to launch salvos at the cliff tops and provide supporting fire for the Rangers. It proves to be a godsend for the landing force.

Meanwhile, 7 KMs away, C Company comes ashore in the face of savage resistance near Pointe de la Percée on OMAHA Beach, taking 35 casualties just to get ashore.

The reinforced 5th Ranger Battalion, having not heard from the 2nd Rangers by the appointed time, commits to go ashore at OMAHA Beach, as alternatively planned. There would be no immediate reinforcements for those already ashore on Pointe du Hoc.

Companies F, D and E of the 2nd Ranger Battalion

2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion

World War II Combat Chronicle

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utes. These formed up into ever larger groups as more and more men made it to the top, and moved on to designated targets. The guns had been moved from their initial prepared positions, but the Rangers nevertheless tracked them down and destroyed them. They pushed on to cut the coastal highway behind Pointe du Hoc, and beat back furious German counterattacks to secure their gains. Meanwhile a contingent of the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion and the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion had fought their way ashore onto Omaha Beach. In concert with the 29th Infantry Division and supporting units they fought their way overland, relieving the embattled defenders of Pointe du Hoc on 8 June.

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The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed into the tough fighting for the Hurtgen Forest. In a particularly noteworthy engagement it secured Bergstein and nearby Castle Hill (Hill 400), and then defended them against furious counterattacks while under heavy artillery fire. The battalion moved on to cross the Roer and the Rhine Rivers, and in concert with the 102nd Cavalry Group formed a combined arms force to cover the V Corps advance into Germany. When the war in Europe ended, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion had secured the major German maneuver area at Grafenwohr and pushed contingents into Czechoslovakia.

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## Craters on the rocky beach below the cliffs

Allied aerial and naval bombardment caused massive craters on the thirty-meter landing beach below the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc. These large bomb and shell craters prevented the planned DUKWs equipped with the Merryweather extending ladders from landing ashore.

## USS Satterlee

The USS Satterlee (DD-626) was a Gleaves-Class Destroyer, displacing 1,630 tons. She was built by the Seattle-Tacoma Shipbuilding Corporation in Seattle, Washington, launched on 17 July 1942 and commissioned on 1 July 1943. She was named for Captain Charles Satterlee, commander of the USCGC Tampa, a ship torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Great Britain in World War I.

The USS Satterlee's first missions were to escort warships in 1943 and 1944. She escorted the battleships USS Texas and USS Arkansas across the Atlantic to Belfast, Northern Ireland, in April 1944. In May 1944, she commenced training for a special mission to support the allied landings in Normandy. Accompanying minesweepers to the beach area throughout the night of 5 June, she began deliberate fire on Pointe du Hoc at 0548 the morning of 6 June. The Satterlee was to support the 2nd Ranger Battalion in its assault on Pointe du Hoc. As the Rangers landed, the USS Satterlee targeted German units and gun emplacements defending Pointe du Hoc. Her timely and accurate fires were critical to the success of the mission. Forty-five years later Lieutenant George Kerchner, a platoon leader in D Company, 2nd Rangers recalled, "Some day I would love to meet up with somebody from Satterlee so I can shake his hand and thank him."

The Satterlee remained off Normandy for 40 days, and then joined the Operation Dragoon invasion force off St. Tropez, southern France, on 15 August 1944. During the landings in southern France the USS Satterlee warded off a night attack by 5 German motor torpedo boats, sinking one from which she captured 12 prisoners. She returned to the United States later that year. In early 1945, the USS Satterlee escorted the cruiser USS Quincy, with President



Franklin D. Roosevelt onboard, to and from the Yalta Conference. After the war in Europe ended the Satterlee redeployed to the Pacific, where she provided carrier escort service and air-sea rescue patrols. The USS Satterlee was decommissioned on 16 March 1946, and struck from the Navy list on 1 December 1970.

The USS Satterlee received two battle stars for her World War II service.

During World War II, commanding officers of the USS Satterlee were:

LCDR Joseph F. Witherow Jr.

LCDR Robert W. Leach and

LCDR Henry Joseph Brantingham

Armaments of the USS Satterlee were:

Four five inch / 38 caliber dual purpose guns

Four 40mm (202) AA guns

Seven 20mm AA guns,

Five 21 in (53 cm) torpedo tubes (Mark 15 torpedos)

Six 8 depth charge projectors

Two depth charge tracks

## HMS Talybont

The HMS Talybont (L18) was built by J. Samuel White in Cowes, Isle of Wight. Laid down in November 1941, she was finally launched 3 February 1943 after a delay due to bomb damage in the shipyard. Named after a famous foxhunt in Cardiganshire, Wales, the HMS Talybont was a Type III Hunt Class escort destroyer, sacrificing the gun turret found in the rear of earlier destroyers for a pair of torpedo tubes.

HMS Talybont was used for defense and patrol purposes starting in mid-1943. She participated in Operation Tunnel, 21 October 1943, as part of a flotilla dispatched to intercept a German blockade-runner. During this operation German torpedo boats hit and sank the HMS Charybdis.

On 5 February 1944, the Talybont was in action with HMS Escort Destroyers Tanatside, Brissenden and Wensleydale against German Torpedo Boat T29 and

minesweepers M156 and M206 off the north coast of Brittany. The Talybont then deployed to the English Channel for convoy defense and interception operations in March and April. In May 1944 the HMS Talybont came under United States Navy command to support the allied landings in Normandy. On 6 June 1944 the HMS Talybont provided fire support for the assault on Omaha Beach and Pointe du Hoc. Her fire support to the 2nd Ranger Battalion on Pointe du Hoc was crucial to the battalion's success over the next two days. The Talybont's timely and accurate fire on enemy gun emplacements and other positions greatly assisted the assault force in reaching its objectives.

On 11 June the Talybont was in action against two German E-Boats that attacked the code named PHOENIX unit on its passage to the Normandy beach-head.

She sustained slight damage from shore battery fire off the Cherbourg Peninsula.

Once released from Operation Neptune, the HMS Talybont continued to patrol the English Channel. On 26 July 1944, she sank several German craft during an offensive sweep.

In November of 1944 the Talybont was damaged in a collision with a freighter in the Thames Estuary.

Under repair until the war ended, the Talybont eventually joined the Mediterranean Fleet based in Malta. She then went into reserve service until 1961, when she was decommissioned and scrapped.

Her commanding officer during D Day was Lt. Edward Francis Baines, DSO.

Promoted to Lt.Cdr. on 1 January 1944.

Specifications:

Displacement: 1050 British tonnes

Complement: 168 men

Max speed: 29 knots

Armament: Four 4" AA guns (2x2)

Four 2 pdr AA (1x4)

Three 20mm AA (3x1)

Two 21" torpedo tubes (1x2)

C Company

## 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion

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## 5th Ranger Battalion

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On June 6, 1944 – D-Day – the 5th Ranger Battalion came ashore on Omaha Beach. Original plans were for it land at the Pointe du Hoc to reinforce the 2nd Ranger Battalion, but it diverted to Omaha when it did not receive a signal indicating the 2nd was successfully ashore by the appointed time. The 5th Ranger Battalion's alternate mission was to attack overland to secure the Pointe du Hoc. German resistance on Omaha Beach was determined, and the American

assault there pinned down. In this chaos Brigadier General Norman Cota of the 29th Infantry Division famously exclaimed "Rangers lead the way!" - now the Ranger motto -- and the embattled Rangers pressed forward under heavy fire as the vanguard of the advance off the beaches. The battalion broke through to seize Vierville on the first day. Beating back fierce German counterattacks, the 5th Ranger Battalion and accompanying units broke through to the Pointe du Hoc and relieved the hard pressed 2nd Rangers on June 8, then pushed on to Grandcamp and Isigny.

After absorbing replacements, retraining and security duties, the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed to the assault on Brest beginning 29 August. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and long the principal German submarine base in France. Ranger patrols swiftly probed outlying defenses, compromising German positions on the high ground around Brest. The Rangers screened difficult terrain between units as the noose around Brest tightened. In the grinding attack the Rangers were assigned some of the most formidable missions, seizing critical forts, pillboxes and positions in carefully coordinated combined arms assaults. In the savage fighting for Brest the battalion killed 624 and captured 2114, while suffering 137 casualties itself.

The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion secured the 12th Army Group Headquarters at Arlon, Belgium during October and November 1944, and then was attached to the Sixth Cavalry Group during savage fighting from Diesen to Ludweiler in Germany. During the German Ardennes Offensive the battalion defended St. Avold, and several times secured sectors over 10,000 meters across - appropriate to a division. In February 1945 the 5th Rangers crossed the Saar River, infiltrated behind German lines, and established a blocking position near Zerf to trap retreating enemy and block reinforcements. This precipitated a savage nine day battle that crushed enemy resistance in the area, opening a route to the Rhine. Once across the Rhine the battalion cleared assigned sectors, participated in the race to the Danube, and ended the war in Pocking, Germany. Sixty-seven Rangers from the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion are buried in American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries: twenty-three in Luxembourg, fourteen in Normandy, thirteen in Brittany, eleven in Lorraine, two in Epinal, and one each in the Ardennes, Cambridge, Henri-Chapelle and North Africa. The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion earned two Distinguished Unit Citations and the French Croix de Guerre during World War II.

Sgt. Leonard Lomell, D Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

As our ramp went down, I'm the first one off the landing craft, running off at the ramp. And as I did I was shot through the side above my hip through the muscle on the right side from a German rifle bullet or machine gun bullet. And I stepped off and I couldn't see the shell crater hole under the water, but a shell had previously been on that very spot and the water was over my head. So I went out of sight and my arms are loaded with company gear and weapons and other things, as a first sergeant I had to carry, which was quite a lot. So my guys pulled me out of the water and get me going again. Fortunately for me, my side was sore and hurt from the shot, but it didn't hit anything important: a bone or a joint or an artery or anything of that nature.

Sgt. Frank South, HQ Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

Being a medic I'd be the last man on the boat. By the time I was unloading it was, seas were still running a bit, quite a bit, and it was being unloaded rapidly, so I ran off the ramp and I stepped into a hole. A lot of people did, 'cause there were all sorts of craters there, and it had gotten soaked and wet, and I felt I was drowning. Obviously I wasn't. And no sooner did I get into that hole that the first cry of medic came. So I was out of the hole with my aid kit, one of the guys from F Company was up against the base of the cliff, a chest wound as I remember. On the top of the cliff that was a machine gun, which was sweeping the area and giving us quite a bit of machine gun fire. And on top of the cliffs there were grenades being tossed over, and of course small arms fire. When you hear the cry of medic, there's no choice. You don't think, you don't think about anything except, you have to go. There's no choice, regardless of what's happening.

Pfc. Francis Coughlin, HQ Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

We were supposed to land right at the cliffs. That was our primary objective. Being that we couldn't, we went up the beach and found one that was open. But there was hardly anybody on it. So that's where the Colonel says, he says,

“We’ll go in here.” And that’s where we went. And that was at Vierville Draw. That’s where we landed.

#### 6 June, 0740: Rangers Crest the Cliffs

The Rangers in each individual landing craft force their own ways off the shore and begin ascending the sheer cliffs. Naval gunfire and Ranger marksmanship pick German defenders off of the high ground.

The USS Satterlee lashes the cliff tops with the fire from its two, twin 40mm and two single 20mm guns. A large section of the soft rock face breaks free. The mounds of cliff side debris form a veritable ramp that extends more than a third of the way up the cliff. The Rangers use these mounds to aid in their climb.

In some cases rockets perform as designed, carrying ropes or rope ladders and grapnels over the crest. Rangers clamber up these ropes and ladders to the top. However, in other cases, ropes are too waterlogged and too heavy for the rockets, and Rangers improvise their climb with sixteen-foot extension ladders.

Rangers aloft secure or throw down ropes to bring up their brethren.

A number of DUKWs are equipped with special fire-fighting ladders that could be raised to 100 feet, with twin Vickers K machine guns mounted at the top.

It is hoped that these guns can rake the top of the cliff and keep the Germans from dropping grenades down on the men climbing.

Due to the craters on the beach, the DUKWs are unable to get ashore.

Nevertheless, one is still able to deploy its ladder offshore, and fire its machine guns, distracting the German defenders.

Despite delay, battlefield confusion and enemy resistance, the Rangers reach



the high ground at Pointe du Hoc within thirty minutes of landing.

Meanwhile C Company of the 2nd Ranger Battalion similarly scales cliffs near Pointe de la Percée, becoming the first onto the high ground flanking OMAHA Beach.

The reinforced 5th Ranger Battalion successfully avoids the most heavily defended sectors of OMAHA Beach, and lands virtually intact on and near Dog White sector.

### USS Satterlee

The USS Satterlee (DD-626) was a Gleaves-Class Destroyer, displacing 1,630 tons. She was built by the Seattle-Tacoma Shipbuilding Corporation in Seattle, Washington, launched on 17 July 1942 and commissioned on 1 July 1943. She was named for Captain Charles Satterlee, commander of the USCGC Tampa, a ship torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Great Britain in World War I.

The USS Satterlee's first missions were to escort warships in 1943 and 1944. She escorted the battleships USS Texas and USS Arkansas across the Atlantic to Belfast, Northern Ireland, in April 1944. In May 1944, she commenced training for a special mission to support the allied landings in Normandy. Accompanying minesweepers to the beach area throughout the night of 5 June, she began deliberate fire on Pointe du Hoc at 0548 the morning of 6 June. The Satterlee was to support the 2nd Ranger Battalion in its assault on Pointe du Hoc. As the Rangers landed, the USS Satterlee targeted German units and gun emplacements defending Pointe du Hoc. Her timely and accurate fires were critical to the success of the mission. Forty-five years later Lieutenant George Kerchner, a platoon leader in D Company, 2nd Rangers recalled, "Some day I would love to meet up with somebody from Satterlee so I can shake his hand and thank him."

The Satterlee remained off Normandy for 40 days, and then joined the Operation Dragoon invasion force off St. Tropez, southern France, on 15 August 1944. During the landings in southern France the USS Satterlee warded off a

night attack by 5 German motor torpedo boats, sinking one from which she captured 12 prisoners. She returned to the United States later that year. In early 1945, the USS Satterlee escorted the cruiser USS Quincy, with President Franklin D. Roosevelt onboard, to and from the Yalta Conference. After the war in Europe ended the Satterlee redeployed to the Pacific, where she provided carrier escort service and air-sea rescue patrols. The USS Satterlee was decommissioned on 16 March 1946, and struck from the Navy list on 1 December 1970.

The USS Satterlee received two battle stars for her World War II service.

During World War II, commanding officers of the USS Satterlee were:

LCDR Joseph F. Witherow Jr.

LCDR Robert W. Leach and

LCDR Henry Joseph Brantingham

Armaments of the USS Satterlee were:

Four five inch / 38 caliber dual purpose guns

Four 40mm (2D2) AA guns

Seven 20mm AA guns,

Five 21 in (53 cm) torpedo tubes (Mark 15 torpedos)

Six D depth charge projectors

Two depth charge tracks

Mounds of cliffside debris

The bombardment and shelling caused part of the cliff side to collapse; leaving piles of debris that shortened the climb to the top.

Ropes or rope ladders and grapnels

Some of the Rangers climbed the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc using rope ladders and two-and-a-half inch ropes fitted with wooden toggle bars. The rope ladders were for use when the cliff was vertical, or had an overhang, and the

toggle ropes on sloping cliffs in place of plain rope. It was found that often, in a sloping cliff, there would be a short vertical cliff to climb, and the toggle ropes were easier to climb than the plain ropes.

The grapnel, which was designed to hold the weight of three men, was screwed into the top of the rocket in place of the usual warhead. To use the equipment the operator held the projector by the handle and pointed it in the desired direction. The rope box was on the ground or deck in front of the projector firing mechanism.

#### Sixteen foot extension ladders

These light tubular steel ladders were manufactured in four-foot sections. Each section was carried by one Ranger and assembled at the base of the cliffs.

#### DUKWs are equipped with special fire-fighting ladders

The DUKW was an amphibious version of the 2-1/2 ton General Motors cargo truck. It was developed by the U. S. Army during World War II as a means to deliver cargo from ships at sea, directly over the shore.

The name comes from the model naming terminology used by General Motors Corporation; the D indicates a vehicle designed in 1942, the U means “utility (amphibious)”, the K indicated four-wheel drive and the W indicated two powered rear axles.

#### 5th Ranger Battalion

##### 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion

##### World War II Combat Chronicle

The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion activated on 1 September 1943 in Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Ranger battalions are all-volunteer, and designed for such

specialized missions as scouting, screening, raiding, ambushing and spear-heading assaults with attacks on key terrain. In World War II American Rangers were heavily influenced by British Commandos, and borrowed tactics, techniques and procedures from them. After intense training the battalion shipped to Leominster, England, and undertook further training in England and Scotland for its role in Operation OVERLORD.

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infiltrated behind German lines, and established a blocking position near Zerf to trap retreating enemy and block reinforcements. This precipitated a savage nine day battle that crushed enemy resistance in the area, opening a route to the Rhine. Once across the Rhine the battalion cleared assigned sectors, participated in the race to the Danube, and ended the war in Pocking, Germany. Sixty-seven Rangers from the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion are buried in American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries: twenty-three in Luxembourg, fourteen in Normandy, thirteen in Brittany, eleven in Lorraine, two in Epinal, and one each in the Ardennes, Cambridge, Henri-Chapelle and North Africa. The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion earned two Distinguished Unit Citations and the French Croix de Guerre during World War II.

Sgt. Leonard Lomell, D Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

My radioman, Bob Fruhling, was next to me, just a few feet away from me on his rope, and we're struggling. And we're at the top of the hundred about to make the top when Bob Fruhling says to me, "Len, Len, can you help me?" And I said, "What's wrong?" He said, "I don't have an ounce of strength left. I can't make it!" And it was only about a foot or two to the top of the cliff. And I said, "Bob, now that you mention it, I don't think I have an ounce of strength left either to make it. But you gotta hold on. Maybe someone, I could get a hold of one of the guys to help us." And with that, I happened to see one of our rangers of D Company, Leonard Rubin. And I yelled to him, "Rube! Rube! Get over there." And he comes over, "What's up?" And I said, "Bob can't make it to the top, he's out of strength. Can you help him?" With that, Rube throws down his weapon, reaches over, grabs Bob and he is so powerful, he jerked Bob up over the cliff, slung him over. Bob's going through the air with his big radio on his back with the antenna whipping around and I'm afraid that's going to draw fire on him. So I'm saying, "Get that antenna down before it draws fire." In the meantime, I gained enough strength to get up. And I'm standing up there with my submachine gun protecting Bob and Rube who are trying to get Bob Fruhling out of this dilemma. And the Germans and Rangers are being shot all around us.

Sgt. William Boyd, E Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

Omaha Beach on D-Day was a real fiasco. I mean, it showed to me, even as young as I was, that everything don't work out the way it should be and you just have to make the best of it, which we did. We were very fortunate. Our battalion commander, his phones got wet, they couldn't contact the second rangers. So he made a decision to go in. Then we saw at Dog Green, where we were supposed to go, they were getting clobbered. And they was just starting to really hit them. And he just told our flotilla to go down and we landed at Dog White. His decision saved a lot of our lives. Because if we'd went in at Dog Green, it was tough.

Sgt. Frank South, HQ Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

As the boats came in of course they fired their rockets and they carried the lines up, the grapnels with the lines up. A number of them failed, but enough of them caught so that the climbing went very rapidly. We had wounded on the beach, at the base cliff, and one of us had to tend them, and I was elected to take care of any new wounded on the beach and the current wounded. And we were afraid too that there might be a short round from the ships offshore that might hit the cliff and then come down on our wounded. So we were trying to get a safe place for them and out of the machine gun fire, which is still operating up there for I don't recall, it was for a couple or three hours before we found the guy. Or was it that long? It just seemed forever, it seemed two to three hours, I don't know. And we never did find him, and the guys of F Company never did find him. They were able to spot his position and then I think it was the Satterlee dropped a couple of rounds on him, a round or two on him, and got the machine gun.

Cpt. John Raaen Jr., HQ Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

The first thing about the beach that you notice is there are dead men all over it and the few that are still quivering are bleeding badly. There are a whole pile, and I actually literally mean a pile of terrified men leaning up against the

seawall, one on top of another, not beside each other, but on top of one another trying to get into the cover there. Those are the visual things that you see. You see puffs of dust as machine gun bullets and rifle bullets are hitting in your area. You hear the smack of bullets as they hit into the breakwaters. And you can hear them and hear them go wayyy off as they ricochet, but you can also hear that thump as they hit a rock and scatter fragments of rocks all over the place. You can hear the bullets passing over you, by this time they still would have shockwaves, so you would hear a crack as every bullet went over your head. And of course, as I said, you'd hear the whining of the ricochets. You would hear the artillery exploding behind you as they hit the boats on the waterline, the shoreline. And the rifle fire and the machine gun fire was just incessant as it cracked over your heads, as it hit into the breakwaters, as it chewed up the turf, as it banged into the road next to us. And it was one horrible noise after another with a lot of little nasty noises in between. And of course when the artillery would hit near you, the whole ground would shake. You'd have dust and fragments and things like that come and litter around you. None of them hurt you, but you noticed them. Oh, it was a scene from hell.

Pfc. Francis Coughlin, HQ Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

When we come in to land, the coxswain, the English coxswain, hit a sandbar. And the sandbar was made out of a couple of bomb craters, blew a lot of sand up. He hit there. And soon as that boat went up and stopped, the ramp went down. Well, it went down a bomb-crater hole, you know. And if you were lucky, you could jump across it, you know, from the end of the walkway you could jump across it. But if you couldn't jump that far, you probably went in up to your knees or something like that. But, then when the colonel went, he says, "Get that boat in closer!" Well, there was no answer and by that time everybody was off the boat. And he backed up and took off and I never seen him again.

6 June, 0815: Rangers Cut Coastal Highway



Using their elite training, each small group of Rangers that make it to the top of the cliffs move out to secure or neutralize platoon objectives – not waiting for others to close up. Their aggressiveness and the flow of battle lead to there being as many as twenty such small groups fighting their way forward. The bombing and shelling has heavily cratered the terrain, thus providing cover but hampering coordination. Small groups consolidate into larger groups as objectives or attack positions are reached.

The Rangers quickly over-run the principal gun emplacements, but find the guns have been moved.

They now fan out to occupy Pointe du Hoc proper, isolating its heavily fortified main bunker and destroying its antennae. Parties from each of the three Ranger companies (D, E and F of the 2nd Ranger Battalion) fight their way through uneven resistance down country lanes that lead to the coastal highway. Neutralizing enemy positions built into farm buildings en route, they force their way across the coastal highway and cut it.

Meanwhile the reinforced 5th Ranger Battalion moves to the sea wall on Dog White, the only intact force of battalion size in the western sector of OMAHA Beach.

Responding to the exhortation by General Norman Cota of the 29th Division “Rangers Lead the Way,” the Rangers push beyond the sea wall and off the beach, up the bluffs, with each platoon advancing by infiltration on its own axis.

Twenty such small groups

#### Ranger Organization and Tactics

Rangers were uniquely organized, trained and equipped to maintain the initiative in chaotic situations. Their organization, modeled on that of the British Commandos, was designed to be light, nimble and readily transportable, and featured platoons small enough to fit in a single assault landing craft. A standard United States Army infantry battalion of the time numbered about 850

soldiers of all ranks organized into three rifle companies, a weapons company and a headquarters company. Rifle companies numbered about 192 men and their constituent platoons about 41. They generally were accompanied by substantial contingents of assigned or attached vehicles, and were embedded in regimental combat teams and divisions even more heavily mechanized. This force as a whole was designed to slug it out in a set battle. A Ranger battalion, on the other hand, numbered 516 men organized into six companies and a headquarters company. Ranger companies numbered 68 men and their platoons 20. This appreciably increased leadership ratios in Ranger units. Leadership richness was reinforced by the fact Rangers were volunteers carefully selected for physique and intelligence, and by Ranger training that consistently emphasized individual initiative and problem solving. Rangers had few vehicles and little heavy equipment of their own, and generally left it behind when attempting raids, clandestine missions or deep infiltrations – their doctrinal specialties. On the Pointe du Hoc Ranger nimbleness and small group initiative manifested itself in several ways. Each platoon made its own way up the cliffs, innovating as necessary and pushing on in small groups once they had reached the top. The consistent pressure of advancing small groups precipitated multiple firefights, as many as twenty individual contingents being in motion at the same time. Ranger companies found themselves fighting in several places at once. D, E and F companies each had contingents fighting at the Pointe du Hoc itself and south of the coastal highway at the same time, for example, and a platoon from the 5th Ranger Battalion infiltrated all the way from Omaha Beach on the first day. Having swiftly compromised the German defenses at the Pointe du Hoc, the lightness of Ranger organization and equipment could have proven a disadvantage in the face of German counterattacks. Fortunately they had badly mauled their nearest opponents, turned German defensive positions and equipment to their own advantage, were well supported by naval gunfire, and were relieved by heavier forces within a little over forty eight hours.

## Gun emplacements

The original German gun emplacements on Pointe du Hoc were circular open pits of World War I design that protected the gun from direct fire, and allowed

it a 360 degree traverse that could be assisted by a rail mount. The design was nick-named a “kettle”, or Kesselbettungen. At Pointe du Hoc the Germans put in six such positions, and equipped them with 155mm guns captured from the French in 1940. The specific model on site was the 155 GPF FILLoux, model K 418, with a range of 19.5 kilometers. The French had put it into service in 1917, and it had been adopted by other nations, including the United States. It had a barrel length of 5915mm, an intrinsic traverse range of 30 degrees each way and intrinsic elevation from 0 to +35 degrees. It fired explosive rounds with a muzzle velocity of 735 meters per second. As the Allies gained air superiority, the vulnerability of the kettle’s open construction became increasingly apparent. This vulnerability was underscored by air attacks on the Pointe du Hoc in May 1944 that damaged several guns and gun positions. From that point the Germans put wooden dummy guns in the emplacements, and concealed the real guns further inland until better protected casemates could be constructed. When the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion seized Pointe du Hoc on 6 June, only two of the casemates were complete and the 155mm guns were still positioned inland.

## Main bunker

### Observation and Command Bunker

The primary purpose of the German position on the Pointe du Hoc was to coordinate artillery fires and provide a firing platform for deadly 155mm guns. To be effective, these functions required a fire control center wherein targeting information could be processed and passed to the guns. To this purpose a Regelbau 636A (R636A) observation and command bunker was built at the tip of Pointe du Hoc, where it enjoyed vistas sweeping into what became OMAHA and UTAH beaches. The R636 featured an observation room, a communications center, crew quarters, and a platform for a range finder on its roof. The R636 bunker at Pointe du Hoc had a small wooden observation bunker associated with it built out even further on the point to accommodate dead space not visible from the primary bunker. This was destroyed by Allied bombardment. The Germans built a total of seventy R636 observation and command bunkers and thirty smaller R637 observation and command bunkers in France. Of these, none was more critically positioned than the one on the tip of the

Pointe du Hoc.

D, E and F of the 2nd Ranger Battalion

2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion

World War II Combat Chronicle

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion activated on 1 April, 1943, in Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Rangers are highly trained volunteers, and Ranger battalions are intended for such specialized missions as scouting, screening, raiding, ambushing and spearheading attacks or invasions with assaults on key terrain. In World War II American Rangers were heavily influenced by British Commandos, and borrowed many tactics, techniques and procedures from them. In December, 1943, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion deployed to Bude, England, and prepared for participation in Operation OVERLORD.

On June 6, 1944 - D-Day - the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion attacked to seize the dominant cliff-bound Pointe du Hoc and destroy German heavy guns positioned there. The guns were positioned in such a manner that they could disrupt landings at both Omaha and Utah Beaches, and had the highest single priority for pre-invasion targets. Despite delay, disruption and casualties in getting ashore, the Rangers, assisted by rocket propelled ropes and rope ladders, climbed the cliffs while under fire and had parties on top within fifteen minutes. These formed up into ever larger groups as more and more men made it to the top, and moved on to designated targets. The guns had been moved from their initial prepared positions, but the Rangers nevertheless tracked them down and destroyed them. They pushed on to cut the coastal highway behind Pointe du Hoc, and beat back furious German counterattacks to secure their gains. Meanwhile a contingent of the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion and the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion had fought their way ashore onto Omaha Beach. In concert with the 29th Infantry Division and supporting units they fought their way overland, relieving the embattled defenders of Pointe du Hoc on 8 June.

After a period of security, reserve and retraining, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was attached to the 29th Infantry Division for the assault on Brest. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and the principal German submarine base in France. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was to secure the right flank

of the 29th Infantry Division, seize the Lochrist Battery with its 280mm guns, and clear the Le Conquet Peninsula. After fierce fighting the battalion accomplished each of these objectives, at times in concert with the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). The fighting for Hill 63 was particularly savage, and the capture of the Lochrist Battery particularly daring.

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed into the tough fighting for the Hurtgen Forest. In a particularly noteworthy engagement it secured Bergstein and nearby Castle Hill (Hill 400), and then defended them against furious counterattacks while under heavy artillery fire. The battalion moved on to cross the Roer and the Rhine Rivers, and in concert with the 102nd Cavalry Group formed a combined arms force to cover the V Corps advance into Germany. When the war in Europe ended, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion had secured the major German maneuver area at Grafenwohr and pushed contingents into Czechoslovakia.

Seventy-six soldiers from the 2nd Ranger Infantry battalion are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission Cemeteries: thirty-nine in Normandy, twelve in Henri-Chapelle, twelve in the Netherlands, eleven in Brittany, and two in Cambridge. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion earned the Presidential Unit Citation, the French Croix de Guerre and the British Military Medal in World War II.

## coastal highway

The coastal highway (D 514) is a small two lane east-west artery that runs parallel to the Calvados/Normandy coastline. During the D-Day landings D 514 was of strategic importance to both sides, used by the Allies to link up the beaches and by the Germans to launch counter attacks. All the exits from Omaha beach and Pointe du Hoc fed into the coastal highway. In the battle of Pointe du Hoc, the road was utilized by the relief column (5th Rangers, 116th Infantry, 743rd Tank Battalion) to relieve the embattled 2nd Rangers on Pointe du Hoc.

## 5th Ranger Battalion

## 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion

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#### General Norman Cota

Norman Daniel “Dutch” Cota, Sr., was born on 30 May 1893 in Chelsea, Massachusetts, and began his career in the United States Armed Forces at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. He graduated in 1917 and was commissioned a second lieutenant of infantry. He returned to West Point as an instructor from 1918 to 1920. He served as an infantry officer in the United States and overseas, attended and subsequently instructed at the Infantry School and the Command and General Staff School, and graduated from the Army War College.

When World War II broke out, Cota served as the G-2 (intelligence officer) and G-3 (training officer) of the 1st Infantry Division before becoming the division chief of staff in June of 1942. He served under Major General Terry de la Mess Allen, Commander of the “Big Red One” (1st Infantry Division) in Operation TORCH, the amphibious invasion of North Africa. In February 1943, he was promoted to Brigadier General and served as United States Army adviser to the Combined Operations Division of the European Theater of Operations in the United Kingdom. He remained there until September 1943, when he transferred to become Assistant Division Commander of the 29th Infantry Division,



one of the designated assault divisions for Omaha Beach on D-Day. He landed with the 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Division on H Hour plus One in the second wave. His LCV came under intense mortar, artillery and small arms fire as it came ashore on Dog White sector of Omaha Beach, yet Cota provided an inspiring example of leadership, and personally directed the onshore battlefield activity of the 29th Infantry Division and its push off of the beaches. His admonition "Rangers, lead the way!" to Lieutenant Colonel Max Schneider and his 5th Ranger Battalion has become the cherished motto of the United States Army Rangers, marking the point the American advance broke out of OMAHA Beach under heavy fire.

General Cota was wounded in the battle for St. Lo while with the 29th Infantry Division, but was given command of the 28th Infantry Division after the capture of that important Norman city. General Cota and 28th Infantry Division, along with the 4th Infantry Division, were granted the honor of representing the United States in the march through Paris celebrating its liberation. Cota was promoted to Major General in September 1944, and with the 28th Infantry Division was subsequently involved in the bloody Battle of Hürtgen Forest along the German border. The battle was fierce and costly, but ultimately succeeded in forcing the Germans off of their formidable defenses. General Cota's son, Norman Jr., was an Army Air Force fighter pilot who flew over the forest where his father's soldiers were so heavily engaged.

General Norman Cota retired from the Army in 1946, and remained in public service for a number of years. He passed away 4 October 1971 in Wichita, Kansas, and is buried at West Point.

General Cota was honored with the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroism and leadership during the Normandy Invasion.

### "Rangers Lead the Way"

Avoiding the sectors of Omaha Beach most exposed to German fires, the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion came ashore early on D-Day and made it to the cover of the sea wall intact. Brigadier General Norman Cota of the 29th Infantry Division, recognizing the value of this fresh organization amidst the carnage of the initial landings, was heard to exclaim "Rangers Lead the Way". The Rangers did just that, assuming the vanguard in their sector as they pushed

off the beaches onto the high ground against fierce resistance. Penetrating some positions and outflanking others, they seized Vierville and opened a vital route whereby vehicles could get off the beaches. They continued the attack to relieve the Pointe du Hoc and secure Grandcamp. This extraordinary performance in desperate circumstances understandably remains a point of pride with United States Army Rangers, and "Rangers Lead the Way" has become their organizational motto. Amongst the initiated it is often represented as "RLTW" at the end of messages and other correspondence. Ranger initiates are inspired to act with the courage and competence of their forbears on Omaha Beach, and to exchange the observation "Rangers Lead the Way.

### Rudders Command Post

At 0745 Colonel James E. Rudder's moved his command post from the beach under the cliffs to a crater next to the German RL 409A 37mm antiaircraft bunker on the eastern edge of the Pointe du Hoc. The bunker seems to have been destroyed by a direct hit from one the USS Satterlee's 5-inch guns just as the three companies of 2nd Ranger Battalion landed on the narrow beach. Rudder himself was observed by his communications officer, Lt James "Ike" Eikner, to have had "the living hell scared out of him" by the falling concrete and debris. The debris from the collapsed cliff did form a large mound that aided the Rangers in their climb. It later helped as supplies and ammunition were carried aloft to the beleaguered Rangers.

At this point, Colonel Rudder's communications were intermittent. His connection with higher command was a signal light EE-84 that allowed him to direct naval gunfire -- crucial to the survival of the Rangers on the Pointe du Hoc. The command post itself became the focus of several remarkable photos taken during the battle. One of the most famous shots includes an American flag draped over the rocks. The flag was placed for the pragmatic purpose of identifying the Rangers to aggressive low-flying American P47 fighter pilots more so than for patriotic display. The prisoners seen on the upper level in the photo were German soldiers and Italian laborers whose distinctive white hats can also be seen in images of prisoners being taken aboard the battleship, USS Texas. Col James Rudder himself appears in top right corner of the photo watching the prisoners being taken away. Sitting on the huge concrete block

to the left of the picture is Ranger Cpl. Lou Lisko.

Sgt. Leonard Lomell, D Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

We fought our way through the Germans, using hand-to-hand combat where necessary, but generally with rifle and submachine gun weapons as we rushed them. And we got to the gun positions that we were assigned, four, five and six, and there were no guns. That there were only these phony posts sticking out of the emplacement making pilots believe, and we who studied their photographs believe, that the guns were in fact there. God knows how long those poles were out there.

Sgt. William Boyd, E Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

General Cota come walking down, running down the beach. He was the brigadier general, he was the ranking officer. And we were all laying there. This was all in the matter of a couple of minutes and he says, "Who are you guys?" or something of that sort. And everybody hollers, "We're the rangers, 5th Ranger Battalion." He turned around as far as I remember, and he says, "Let's get the hell off of this beach. Let's get going." He says, "You guys go." then we started. Went up the hill toward Vierville-sur-Mer.

Sgt. Frank South, HQ Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

I went on up to the top, and then to what became the aid station, which had originally been an AKAK gun emplacement that was now an aid station. Pitch black, but with flashlights we were able to operate. And then, the remaining supply boats, one foundered and the other one came in, had gasoline lanterns, thank God, which allowed us to work in this place because it was a great dark room.

Cpt. John Raaen Jr., HQ Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

I was about to move out with my men to move to where the wire was to be blown, and somebody said, "Hey Captain, look at that guy." And I looked down the beach and here was this man with a cigarette, a cigar in his hand waving it and yelling and talking to the troops, just strolling down the beach. And I said, "My God, he's got to be crazy enough to be a reporter or maybe even a general." And by the time he got to the seawall or the breakwater, I figured that it was the latter of those two. So I jumped up and ran over to meet him as he came around the breakwater and said, "Sir, Captain Raaen. 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion." And he said, "Raaen? Raaen," He says, "you must be Jack Raaen's son." And I said, "Yes sir, I am." He says, "What's the situation here?" So I said, "Well the 5th Battalion has landed over a front extending two-hundred yards down to this point. The battalion commander has given the command to proceed by infiltration to the rallying points." He said, "Fine, fine. Where's the battalion commander?" And I said, "He's right over there." And actually, I could see Colonel Schneider sitting on the seawall kicking his feet up with his back to the enemy, just kicking his feet up. And all that hell, they call it Bloody Omaha and it was. But, Schneider was sitting there just as unconcerned as could be. And I said, "I'll take you over to him." He said, "You will not, you'll stay with your men." I said, "Yes sir," and that's another lesson I learned very quickly. And at that point then as he started away, he stopped, turned and of course, every ranger and probably every infantryman in the whole area was listening to what the General had to say. And that's when he said, "You men are rangers. I know you won't let me down." There were three bays between me and Schneider and in each bay there were Rangers. And of course we had the orange diamonds on our helmets and we had the Ranger patches on our shoulders. And as he was going along he could see that there were rangers there. And so he would say something different to each one of those groups. And the last version apparently was "Rangers," and this was to Schneider really plus all the men around him, "Rangers lead the way!" Because the hole had been blown and the troop were pouring through.

Pfc. Francis Coughlin, HQ Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

The fire and the shells, they were coming in all day. And we got off the beach, I would say, before ten o'clock we were off the beach because we couldn't

wait any longer. What we were waiting for was more men. Well, they never showed up, so the colonel says, "Blow the barbed wire," and he says, "let's get out of here." So, the two guys blew the hole in the barbed wire and up the hill we went. Went through the town, got on the west side of town, and that's where we got stopped. And there was a hell of a lot of fighting up in front of us.

#### 6 June, 0930: Rangers Destroy the Guns

Small patrols push out past the Rangers' defensive positions at Pointe du Hoc and cross the coastal highway.

Sgt Len Lomell and S/Sgt Jack Kuhn of D Company discover five of the 155mm guns in an orchard. They are heavily camouflaged, amply stockpiled with ammunition, and oriented on UTAH Beach. They are not manned, however.

The rapid pace with which D, E and F companies of the 2nd Rangers scaled the cliffs and pressed the attack, and subsequent confusion caused by multiple firefights throughout the Pointe du Hoc plateau, seems to have delayed the return of German artillerymen to their guns from bunkers they had sheltered in during the naval bombardment.

The Rangers get to the guns first. Lomell and Kuhn destroy two of the guns with thermite grenades and damage the sights of the rest. Sgt. Lomell then procures additional thermite grenades from other Rangers, and completes the destruction of the guns. A second patrol of Rangers arrives to assist, and they set fire to the ammunition.

Both patrols then hastily withdraw to rejoin their comrades along the highway. A runner is dispatched to advise Col Rudder at the Ranger command post on Pointe du Hoc that this critical mission has been accomplished.

Meanwhile the 5th Ranger Battalion has scaled the bluffs above OMAHA Beach, as have A and B Companies of the 2nd Ranger Battalion alongside them. These penetrations lead the way in the vicious fighting to get off of

fiercely contested OMAHA Beach.

155mm guns

155 GPF FILLOUX, model K 418, range 19,5 KM.

Put into service by the French in 1917, it was taken into service by the U.S. Army as a 155 mm gun (M1918 M1) by the field artillery. It remained in service until the beginning of WWII. In 1940 the French had about 450 canons in stock, the greater part taken by the Wehrmacht at the Armistice as the 15.5 cm FeldKanone. They were dispersed along coastal defenses as of 1942.

Barrel length: 5915 mm. The mount allowed a traverse range of 30 degrees each way and an elevation from 0 to +35 degrees.

The gun fired explosive rounds with a muzzle velocity of 735 m/sec. The maximum shot range was 19,500 meters.

D, E and F companies

2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion

World War II Combat Chronicle

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion activated on 1 April, 1943, in Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Rangers are highly trained volunteers, and Ranger battalions are intended for such specialized missions as scouting, screening, raiding, ambushing and spearheading attacks or invasions with assaults on key terrain. In World War II American Rangers were heavily influenced by British Commandos, and borrowed many tactics, techniques and procedures from them. In December, 1943, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion deployed to Bude, England, and prepared for participation in Operation OVERLORD.

On June 6, 1944 - D-Day - the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion attacked to seize the dominant cliff-bound Pointe du Hoc and destroy German heavy guns positioned there. The guns were positioned in such a manner that they could disrupt landings at both Omaha and Utah Beaches, and had the highest single priority for pre-invasion targets. Despite delay, disruption and casualties in getting ashore, the Rangers, assisted by rocket propelled ropes and rope ladders, climbed the cliffs while under fire and had parties on top within fifteen min-

utes. These formed up into ever larger groups as more and more men made it to the top, and moved on to designated targets. The guns had been moved from their initial prepared positions, but the Rangers nevertheless tracked them down and destroyed them. They pushed on to cut the coastal highway behind Pointe du Hoc, and beat back furious German counterattacks to secure their gains. Meanwhile a contingent of the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion and the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion had fought their way ashore onto Omaha Beach. In concert with the 29th Infantry Division and supporting units they fought their way overland, relieving the embattled defenders of Pointe du Hoc on 8 June.

After a period of security, reserve and retraining, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was attached to the 29th Infantry Division for the assault on Brest. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and the principal German submarine base in France. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was to secure the right flank of the 29th Infantry Division, seize the Lochrist Battery with its 280mm guns, and clear the Le Conquet Peninsula. After fierce fighting the battalion accomplished each of these objectives, at times in concert with the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). The fighting for Hill 63 was particularly savage, and the capture of the Lochrist Battery particularly daring.

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed into the tough fighting for the Hurtgen Forest. In a particularly noteworthy engagement it secured Bergstein and nearby Castle Hill (Hill 400), and then defended them against furious counterattacks while under heavy artillery fire. The battalion moved on to cross the Roer and the Rhine Rivers, and in concert with the 102nd Cavalry Group formed a combined arms force to cover the V Corps advance into Germany. When the war in Europe ended, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion had secured the major German maneuver area at Grafenwohr and pushed contingents into Czechoslovakia.

Seventy-six soldiers from the 2nd Ranger Infantry battalion are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission Cemeteries: thirty-nine in Normandy, twelve in Henri-Chapelle, twelve in the Netherlands, eleven in Brittany, and two in Cambridge. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion earned the Presidential Unit Citation, the French Croix de Guerre and the British Military Medal in World War II.

## Multiple firefights

### Ranger Organization and Tactics

Rangers were uniquely organized, trained and equipped to maintain the initiative in chaotic situations. Their organization, modeled on that of the British Commandos, was designed to be light, nimble and readily transportable, and featured platoons small enough to fit in a single assault landing craft. A standard United States Army infantry battalion of the time numbered about 850 soldiers of all ranks organized into three rifle companies, a weapons company and a headquarters company. Rifle companies numbered about 192 men and their constituent platoons about 41. They generally were accompanied by substantial contingents of assigned or attached vehicles, and were embedded in regimental combat teams and divisions even more heavily mechanized. This force as a whole was designed to slug it out in a set battle. A Ranger battalion, on the other hand, numbered 516 men organized into six companies and a headquarters company. Ranger companies numbered 68 men and their platoons 20. This appreciably increased leadership ratios in Ranger units. Leadership richness was reinforced by the fact Rangers were volunteers carefully selected for physique and intelligence, and by Ranger training that consistently emphasized individual initiative and problem solving. Rangers had few vehicles and little heavy equipment of their own, and generally left it behind when attempting raids, clandestine missions or deep infiltrations – their doctrinal specialties. On the Pointe du Hoc Ranger nimbleness and small group initiative manifested itself in several ways. Each platoon made its own way up the cliffs, innovating as necessary and pushing on in small groups once they had reached the top. The consistent pressure of advancing small groups precipitated multiple firefights, as many as twenty individual contingents being in motion at the same time. Ranger companies found themselves fighting in several places at once. D, E and F companies each had contingents fighting at the Pointe du Hoc itself and south of the coastal highway at the same time, for example, and a platoon from the 5th Ranger Battalion infiltrated all the way from Omaha Beach on the first day. Having swiftly compromised the German defenses at the Pointe du Hoc, the lightness of Ranger organization and equipment could have proven a disadvantage in the face of German counterattacks. Fortunately they had badly mauled their nearest opponents, turned German defensive positions and equipment to their own advantage, were well sup-



ported by naval gunfire, and were relieved by heavier forces within a little over forty eight hours.

## Bunkers

The German defenses of Pointe du Hoc were intended to protect troops deployed there from air and naval bombardment, as well as to provide obstacles and fighting positions once indirect fires shifted and direct fire engagements began. To this purpose the Germans constructed an array of bunkers connected by trench lines and proximate to fighting positions. Bunkers on the Pointe du Hoc were built in accordance with standard designs, or Regelbau. Standardization allowed for the incorporation of prefabrication, and made it more likely that newly assigned personnel would be immediately familiar with the features of their bunker. Infantrymen on the Pointe du Hoc were to wait out the initial bombardment in one Regelbau 501 (R501), one R621 and two R502 shelters. The R501 has a single L shaped entrance with stairway access leading to a gas lock through which the crew quarters can be reached. It is a squad shelter designed for ten men and was furnished with bunks, a table and chairs, closets and rifle racks. The R621 is similar to the R501 and also designed for ten men, but has two entrances. The R502 is designed for twenty men and has two entrances with stairway access leading through gas locks. It features a periscope room in addition to the troop chambers, and latrines in the outer entrance ways. Soldiers observed the battlefield from periscopes or from built-in Ringstande ("Tobruks"), giving their comrades the signal to rush up the stairways when direct fire contact was imminent. An additional personnel bunker on the Pointe du Hoc was an R661, similar to the rest but modified to serve as a medical bunker. Ammunition also had to be protected from bombardment, and it would have been unwise to store too much in the troop shelters or fighting positions. The Germans constructed three R134 munitions bunkers on the Pointe du Hoc. The R134 had two segregated ammunition rooms, each of which had its own entrance through a tunnel with two exits. These several type of bunkers were distributed across the Pointe du Hoc in such a manner that each casemate or anticipated fighting position had one proximate to it.

## Thermite grenades

A cylindrical grenade, the M14 is a purpose designed incendiary grenade. Working off the intense and violent reaction of the thermite filler, the end result of the detonation of the M14 is molten iron. This means the M14 is primarily employed on material to be destroyed in a roughly secure environment and not as an offensive or defensive weapon. A classic military use for thermite grenades is disabling artillery pieces, and these were used commonly for this purpose in WW2. Thermite can permanently disable artillery pieces without the use of explosive charges and therefore can be used when silence is necessary to an operation. There are several ways to do this. By far the most destructive method is to weld the weapon shut by inserting one or more armed thermite grenades into the breech and then quickly closing it. This makes the weapon impossible to load. An alternative method is to insert an armed thermite grenade down the muzzle of the artillery piece, fouling the barrel. This makes the piece very dangerous to fire. Yet another method is to use thermite to weld the traversing and elevation mechanism of the weapon, making it impossible to aim properly.

Ten thermite grenades for demolition were distributed within each Ranger company.

## Ranger command post on Pointe du Hoc

### Rudder's Command Post

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## 5th Ranger Battalion

### 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion

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the 5th Ranger Battalion and accompanying units broke through to the Pointe du Hoc and relieved the hard pressed 2nd Rangers on June 8, then pushed on to Grandcamp and Isigny.

After absorbing replacements, retraining and security duties, the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed to the assault on Brest beginning 29 August. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and long the principal German submarine base in France. Ranger patrols swiftly probed outlying defenses, compromising German positions on the high ground around Brest. The Rangers screened difficult terrain between units as the noose around Brest tightened. In the grinding attack the Rangers were assigned some of the most formidable missions, seizing critical forts, pillboxes and positions in carefully coordinated combined arms assaults. In the savage fighting for Brest the battalion killed 624 and captured 2114, while suffering 137 casualties itself.

The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion secured the 12th Army Group Headquarters at Arlon, Belgium during October and November 1944, and then was attached to the Sixth Cavalry Group during savage fighting from Diesen to Ludweiler in Germany. During the German Ardennes Offensive the battalion defended St. Avold, and several times secured sectors over 10,000 meters across – appropriate to a division. In February 1945 the 5th Rangers crossed the Saar River, infiltrated behind German lines, and established a blocking position near Zerf to trap retreating enemy and block reinforcements. This precipitated a savage nine day battle that crushed enemy resistance in the area, opening a route to the Rhine. Once across the Rhine the battalion cleared assigned sectors, participated in the race to the Danube, and ended the war in Pocking, Germany. Sixty-seven Rangers from the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion are buried in American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries: twenty-three in Luxembourg, fourteen in Normandy, thirteen in Brittany, eleven in Lorraine, two in Epinal, and one each in the Ardennes, Cambridge, Henri-Chapelle and North Africa. The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion earned two Distinguished Unit Citations and the French Croix de Guerre during World War II.

Sgt. Leonard Lomell, D Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

There was this position of five guns, all of it ready with their shells all at the ready also. And there's a hundred or so, seventy-five to a hundred, German

men coming from all directions, putting on their jackets. The invasion was a complete surprise to them, particularly in this part of the world atop these cliffs. And so, I said, "Jack, you get up on that high hedgerow. Keep an eye on those hundred guys. And I'll see what I can do in and among those guns." So, he did, he got up there and watched those guys. They were organizing. There were no guards on the guns that I saw. But I went in and I had his grenade, a thermite grenade, and my thermite grenade. So I used that to weld together the traversing mechanisms and the elevation mechanisms of the tubes of the barrels of these guns. Then I took my field jacket off, I wrapped that around my submachine gun stock and I smashed the sights of all five guns.

Cpt. John Raaen Jr., HQ Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

There was chemical smoke being used. In fact, I think that's what started the brushfire that was above us. That was the other thing that saved our necks. That brushfire burned over the German trench positions on the forward part of the crest and the Germans had to get out or be roasted to death, so they abandoned those positions. The other positions couldn't see through the smoke, so the people above us could not shoot at us. It was only these people way down on our right that were shooting at us. So we punched through a soft spot. There were a couple of little fights where Germans had stayed in their trenches, only to find an American standing above them with a bayonet and rifle. There were a few little fights like that, quickly ended, because they were so surprised to see us. And, the rest of them had pulled out.

6 June, 1600: Rangers Repel Counterattacks

German Field Marshall Irwin Rommel has committed to frequent and furious counterattacks to push the allies back into the sea before they can consolidate ashore.

Pointe du Hoc is a particular target for such counterattacks, since the cliffs greatly complicate American reinforcement and the position splits UTAH and OMAHA Beaches.

The defending Rangers are now perilously thin; the diversion of the reinforced 5th Ranger Battalion through OMAHA Beach has left them with a third of the force originally intended to secure Pointe du Hoc on the first day. The defenders are effectively split between those securing Pointe du Hoc proper and those across the coastal highway.

Germans who have survived the initial Ranger assault now take advantage of tunnels, craters and terrain familiarity to plague the Rangers with sniper and machine gun fire, first from one position, then from another. Reinforcing Germans attack upon arriving.

The Rangers beat back two determined counterattacks from two different directions on Pointe du Hoc.

Meanwhile the reinforced 5th Ranger Battalion and elements of the 116th Infantry Regiment – now in contact with C Company of the 2nd Ranger Battalion -- fight their way off of OMAHA Beach and through the town of Vierville, advancing down the coastal highway in the direction of Pointe du Hoc.

#### Field Marshall Irwin Rommel

Erwin Johannes Eugen Rommel, born 15 November 1891, was arguably the most well-known German soldier of World War II. Having enlisted in the German army in 1910, he fought in France, Romania and Italy during World War I. When the war ended, Erwin Rommel remained in the German Army and by 1929 was appointed instructor at the Infantry School in Dresden. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel in October 1935 and began teaching at the Potsdam War Academy. An excellent teacher, Rommel's lectures were published as a book on infantry tactics in 1937. The book was read by Hitler, who was greatly impressed by Rommel's ideas of battle. Hitler arranged for him to command his HQ staff in Austria and Czechoslovakia and he was given the same position in Poland in the following year.

With the Second World War beginning, Erwin Rommel was in an excellent

position to receive battle command, which he very much desired. In May 1940 Erwin Rommel was given command of the powerful 7th Panzer Division. This invaded France leading the Blitzkrieg, or Lightning War, as it came to be known. Rommel's troops moved faster and farther than any other army in German military history. After reaching the English Channel, his division rapidly turned south and exploited deep into France. Heavily reliant on surprise and speed, and willing to expose his flanks to penetrate deep, Rommel was largely responsible for Germany's ease in overwhelming the French and British forces.

Due to his success in Europe, Rommel was sent by the German general staff to North Africa to battle the British Eighth Army. The fighting in North Africa soon earned Rommel the nickname, "Desert Fox." In North Africa, Rommel's "brilliant quick-thinking, opportunism, and leadership" on the battlefield outwitted the "slow, ponderous, and remote" British chain of command despite logistical inferiority. (Blumenson). In June 1942, Rommel defeated the British 8th Army at Tobruk destroying more than 260 tanks and bagging 30,000 prisoners of war. At 49, Rommel attained the rank of Field Marshal - the youngest in the Wehrmacht. But as Germany's fortunes waned, Rommel repeatedly pleaded with Hitler for permission to evacuate his Afrika Korps from North Africa while there was still time. Rommel felt he should use this force to beef up fortress Europe. In the face of Hitler's constant refusals, Rommel confided increasingly to his wife about his loss of faith in Hitler's sanity.

Prevented from evacuating the Afrika Korps, Rommel led his army on a masterful 1,400-mile retreat while his arch-nemesis in the field, General Bernard Montgomery was unable to pin him down. In his first encounter with U.S. forces that landed in North Africa, Rommel inflicted losses of 6,000 men, 183 tanks, and 200 artillery pieces at a cost to his force of 1,000 men and only 20 tanks in the Battle of the Kasserine Pass in Tunisia. This was a major defeat for the new unblooded American forces and its commanders learned quickly. The combined Anglo-American enemy grew ever more powerful in numbers and logistics and tactics while the supplies of the Afrika Korps dwindled. Rommel could see that disaster was fast approaching. Locked in a no-retreat posture, Hitler continued to ignore Rommel's pleas to save the 250,000 men of the Afrika Korps and its Italian allies from annihilation.

Following the final defeat of the Afrika Korps in Tunisia, Hitler sent Rommel to France to inspect the coastal defenses against the long-anticipated Anglo-American landing on the continent.

On 21 November 1943, Field Marshal Rommel was given overall command of Army Group B in France with the responsibility of defending the coast from the awaited Allied invasion of Europe. Rommel was dismayed by the lack of completed works and the slow building pace and feared he had just months before an invasion. Rommel reinvigorated the fortification effort along the entire Atlantic coast. He had enormous amounts of manpower and materials at his disposal to construct a true Atlantic Wall, and he did just that – constructing thousands of massive concrete and steel fortifications along the coastline of Normandy.

Rommel believed that Normandy was indeed a likely landing ground, and argued that it did not matter to him where the Allies landed, as long as the landings were hit hard and stopped on the beaches -- instead of fighting inland where it would be too late. Rommel toured the Normandy defenses extensively in January and February 1944, and ordered millions of mines laid and thousands of tank traps and obstacles set up on beaches and throughout the countryside, including in fields suitable for glider aircraft landings. The wooden poles he had planted in the ground to destroy gliders were nicknamed Rommelspargel, or “Rommel’s Asparagus.”

However, on D-Day, 6 June 1944, Rommel himself was unprepared for the invasion. Perhaps feeling that the weather was inappropriate for a landing, he had gone home to Germany for his wife’s birthday. It was a costly error. He could not directly lead his defensive forces to counter the landings. Instead, returning later that day, Rommel realized that Allied forces had already established a strong beachhead on the five Normandy landing zones.

Following D-Day, Rommel repeatedly tried to impress upon Hitler that the battle for France would be lost unless the Wehrmacht withdrew to shorter and more stable front lines. Hitler angrily refused to accept this strategic reality, and Rommel was now convinced that Hitler harbored a death wish and intended to drag Germany down with him.



Early in the summer of 1944, Rommel was approached about joining the July Plot to assassinate Hitler. Rommel refused, criticizing the tactic of assassination and claiming that it would turn Hitler into a martyr. Instead he suggested that he should be arrested and brought to trial.

On 17 July 1944, RAF fighters strafed Rommel's motorcade along a French country road, killing his driver. Rommel's car spun out of control and the field marshal was hurtled into a ditch with severe head injuries. He would remain in hospitals for a month. While he was in the hospital, the July Plot was attempted but failed. Hitler survived the assassination attempt.

Owing to his knowledge of and association with the conspirators, it was only a matter of time before Rommel was implicated. Two different stories describe how this happened. According to the first, Luftwaffe Colonel Caesar von Hofacker (Stauffenberg's cousin) divulged Rommel's name under torture. According to a second story, General von Stuelpnagel, who had tried to commit suicide and had been revived and brought to a German field hospital, was heard crying out Rommel's name repeatedly in delirium.

On October 7, 1944, Rommel declined a summons from Hitler to come to Berlin. On October 14, two generals visited Rommel at his residence in Errlingen and handed him a cyanide capsule and a message from Hitler: commit suicide and be buried with honors, or stand trial for high treason and be hanged -- which implied the loss of his family's livelihood. Rommel bade farewell to his wife and son and was driven off in an army car after swallowing the capsule. Rommel was buried with full-military honors and given a hero's farewell.

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to trap retreating enemy and block reinforcements. This precipitated a savage nine day battle that crushed enemy resistance in the area, opening a route to the Rhine. Once across the Rhine the battalion cleared assigned sectors, participated in the race to the Danube, and ended the war in Pocking, Germany. Sixty-seven Rangers from the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion are buried in American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries: twenty-three in Luxembourg, fourteen in Normandy, thirteen in Brittany, eleven in Lorraine, two in Epinal, and one each in the Ardennes, Cambridge, Henri-Chapelle and North Africa. The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion earned two Distinguished Unit Citations and the French Croix de Guerre during World War II.

## Two determined counterattacks

### Afternoon Counterattacks

About a hundred artillerymen from the 2nd Battery of the 1260th Army Coast Artillery Battalion, commanded by an Oberleutenant Brotkorb, and gun crews from the Luftwaffe's 32nd Flak Battalion manned Pointe du Hoc. These were soon reinforced by infantry companies from the 726th and 914th Grenadier Regiments. At 0805, after the 2nd Ranger Battalion landed at the Pointe du Hoc, a radio message was sent from the nearby 916th Grenadier Regiment to the headquarters of the parent 352nd Infantry Division: "A weak enemy force has penetrated into the Pointe du Hoc and a platoon 9./ Grenadier Regiment 726 is being sent to counterattack." This counterattack failed.

A more significant counterattack occurred in the early afternoon when a company of the German 726th Infantry Regiment attacked out of St. Pierre du Monte. The 2nd Ranger Battalion repulsed this attack with massed rifle and BAR fires. A third and even more powerful attack emerged around 1600 from the 2. / 914th Grenadier Regiment stationed south of Grandcamp. This attack was finally broken up with the help of the Rangers' single remaining 60mm mortar and barrages from the destroyers USS Barton and USS Satterlee

## 116th Infantry Regiment

## World War II Campaign Chronicle

The 116th Infantry Regiment was a constituent unit of the 29th Infantry Division – the “Blue and Gray Division” – during World War II. The regiment traced its roots to Virginia Militia organized in 1742 that fought the French and Indians, and later the British during the American Revolution. During the Civil War this militia served under General Thomas J. Jackson in the famous “Stonewall” Brigade. During World War I it was reorganized into the 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division, and saw significant combat in France. In February 1941 the 116th Infantry Regiment and 29th Infantry Division, now National Guard, were called into Federal Service.

The 116th Infantry Regiment assault landed onto Omaha Beach on 6 June, 1944. Seas were choppy and cross currents strong. Many landing craft came ashore far from where they had intended. German resistance, supported by significant obstacles, was organized and determined. American units were intermingled, exposed and under heavy fire. Nevertheless the soldiers clawed their way onto bluffs overlooking the beaches and outflanked the draw at Vierville-sur-Mer, capable of passing vehicles to higher ground. The 116th pushed on with the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion and 743rd Tank Battalion to relieve the embattled 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion defending the critical Pointe du Hoc, captured in a daring assault up the cliffs from the sea. The 116th supported the attack that seized Isigny and closed to the Vire River. The 29th Infantry Division linked up with the 101st Airborne Division near Carentan on 10 June, and by 12 June Omaha and Utah Beaches were a continuous front behind which the American buildup continued.

The 116th Infantry Regiment pushed on through difficult bocage terrain and thickening German opposition towards the strategic town of St. Lo. The regiment participated in the fierce fighting to secure the Martinville Ridge, key terrain overlooking St. Lo. A battalion of the 116th pushed within 1,000 meters of the town on 15 July, but became cut off. A relieving battalion of the 116th commanded by Major Thomas D. Howie broke through to them, but Howie was killed when the combined units continued their advance. The 29th Infantry Division finally secured St. Lo on 18 July, and laid Howie’s flag-draped coffin on the rubble-buried pediment of Ste. Croix Church, a poignant symbol of courage and sacrifice.

On 29 July, as the Operation COBRA breakout offensive sped towards Avranches and points beyond, the 29th Infantry Division with the 116th Infantry Regiment leading attacked along COBRA’s left shoulder to broaden the

offensive and secure its flank. Near Tessy-sur-Vire, Villebaudon and Percy the division collided with the German 2nd and 116th Panzer Divisions. These were the only significant German armored forces proximate to the breakthrough, and were rolling west in a desperate effort to plug the emerging gap. Instead the 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments tied them into a roiling mobile battle that ultimately favored the Americans.

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The 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments redeployed over 200 miles to the German border. In October the 116th Infantry Regiment took part in fierce fighting around Aachen, the first German city to fall to the Allies. The division then pushed on to the Roer River, and held that line during the German Ardennes offensive from December through January 1945. The 29th Infantry Division forced the Roer and advanced through Munchen-Gladbach, and the 116th participated in mopping up the Ruhr Pocket in April. The 29th Infantry Division then pushed on to the Elbe River, and linked up with advancing Russian forces on 2 May. The division was deactivated from federal service and reactivated in a National Guard status in 1946.

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of 786 of its World War II Soldiers are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries in Europe.

### Coastal highway

The coastal highway (D 514) is a small two lane east-west artery that runs parallel to the Calvados/Normandy coastline. During the D-Day landings D 514 was of strategic importance to both sides, used by the Allies to link up the beaches and by the Germans to launch counter attacks. All the exits from Omaha beach and Pointe du Hoc fed into the coastal highway. In the battle of Pointe du Hoc, the road was utilized by the relief column (5th Rangers, 116th Infantry, and 743rd Tank Battalion) to relieve the embattled 2nd Rangers on Pointe du Hoc.

### 155mm gun

155 GPF FILLOUX, model K 418, range 19,5 KM.

Put into service by the French in 1917, it was taken into service by the U.S. Army as a 155 mm gun (M1918 M1) by the field artillery. It remained in service until the beginning of WWII. In 1940 the French had about 450 canons in stock, the greater part taken by the Wehrmacht at the Armistice as the 15.5 cm Feldkanone. They were dispersed along coastal defenses as of 1942. Barrel length: 5915 mm. The mount allowed a traverse range of 30 degrees each way and an elevation from 0 to +35 degrees. The gun fired explosive rounds with a muzzle velocity of 735 m/sec. The maximum shot range was 19,500 meters.

### Rudder's Command Post

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under the cliffs to a crater next to the German RL 409A 37mm antiaircraft bunker on the eastern edge of the Pointe du Hoc. The bunker seems to have been destroyed by a direct hit from one of the USS Satterlee's 5-inch guns just as the three companies of 2nd Ranger Battalion landed on the narrow beach. Rudder himself was observed by his communications officer, Lt James "Ike" Eikner, to have had "the living hell scared out of him" by the falling concrete and debris. The debris from the collapsed cliff did form a large mound that aided the Rangers in their climb. It later helped as supplies and ammunition were carried aloft to the beleaguered Rangers.

At this point, Colonel Rudder's communications were intermittent. His connection with higher command was a signal light EE-84 that allowed him to direct naval gunfire -- crucial to the survival of the Rangers on the Pointe du Hoc. The command post itself became the focus of several remarkable photos taken during the battle. One of the most famous shots includes an American flag draped over the rocks. The flag was placed for the pragmatic purpose of identifying the Rangers to aggressive low-flying American P47 fighter pilots more so than for patriotic display. The prisoners seen on the upper level in the photo were German soldiers and Italian laborers whose distinctive white hats can also be seen in images of prisoners being taken aboard the battleship, USS Texas. Col James Rudder himself appears in top right corner of the photo watching the prisoners being taken away. Sitting on the huge concrete block to the left of the picture is Ranger Cpl. Lou Lisko.

Sgt. Leonard Lomell, D Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

Well the counterattacks were intermittent. Don't forget, the Germans were as surprised as anybody that this invasion was taking place. I think the first night they attacked three times. I lost count after a while and didn't bother keeping count. These firefights can last for a few minutes or a few hours. You never know how long they're going to last. The attacking force can leave and circle you. But you've got to be alert the first twenty-four hours, you may not be fighting all the time. And they're only gonna fight when they think they can win.

Cpt. John Raaen Jr., HQ Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

As we moved into Vierville, B Company had run into severe resistance along with C Company of the 116th, they were side-by-side, had run into severe resistance on the far side of Vierville, one of these widerstandsneests that was guarding the gully. As we came up, we made plans to force our way through this resistance and proceed on to Pointe du Hoc. However, 116th Infantry commander, Colonel Canham said, "No. I don't know if we can hold the beachhead as it is. And to lose a ranger battalion is unthinkable. You will take positions and you will protect the west edge, around in a semicircle, of the beachhead." And so that's what we did. D Company was out front there, C Company was here, B Company was down there, C Company of the 116th was there, C Company of the 2nd was right there so we had that coming around. And I don't know, but I think E Company and then A Company were around. It was wise. We received a couple of severe counterattacks, Company-sized strength. And Canham was doubtless right, doubtless right, to hold us in. What had happened to the 2nd had happened to the 2nd. It had happened to the 2nd, there's nothing you can undo about it. We'll just go ahead and we'll protect this flank of the beachhead. In the morning, we had plans for the entire 116th and the 5th rangers and what 2nd we'd collected to advance on Pointe du Hoc.

6 June, 2100: Platoon Fights its Way in from Omaha Beach

The Rangers from D, E and F Companies of the 2nd Ranger Battalion astride the coastal highway have inflicted considerable damage in a confused situation. They shoot up or capture Germans attempting to move east and west along the highway, and destroy contingents trying to make their way south from Pointe du Hoc. Their presence relieves the pressure on Pointe du Hoc itself, since German units moving in from the south have to deal with them first.

Plans had called for the Rangers to hold along the highway until relieved by American units moving overland from OMAHA Beach. Savage fighting on OMAHA has delayed relief. The 5th Ranger Battalion and elements of the 116th Infantry beat back German counterattacks and secure Vierville while V Corps



consolidates its grip. One platoon of the 5th Ranger Battalion, surmounting the odds against it, bypasses Vierville, fights fierce engagements, and marches cross-country to link up with 2nd Rangers astride the highway. The arrival of this contingent, although small, is heartening.

The Rangers from D, E and F Companies of the 2nd Ranger Battalion

## 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion

### World War II Combat Chronicle

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion activated on 1 April, 1943, in Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Rangers are highly trained volunteers, and Ranger battalions are intended for such specialized missions as scouting, screening, raiding, ambushing and spearheading attacks or invasions with assaults on key terrain. In World War II American Rangers were heavily influenced by British Commandos, and borrowed many tactics, techniques and procedures from them. In December, 1943, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion deployed to Bude, England, and prepared for participation in Operation OVERLORD.

On June 6, 1944 - D-Day - the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion attacked to seize the dominant cliff-bound Pointe du Hoc and destroy German heavy guns positioned there. The guns were positioned in such a manner that they could disrupt landings at both Omaha and Utah Beaches, and had the highest single priority for pre-invasion targets. Despite delay, disruption and casualties in getting ashore, the Rangers, assisted by rocket propelled ropes and rope ladders, climbed the cliffs while under fire and had parties on top within fifteen minutes. These formed up into ever larger groups as more and more men made it to the top, and moved on to designated targets. The guns had been moved from their initial prepared positions, but the Rangers nevertheless tracked them down and destroyed them. They pushed on to cut the coastal highway behind Pointe du Hoc, and beat back furious German counterattacks to secure their gains. Meanwhile a contingent of the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion and the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion had fought their way ashore onto Omaha Beach. In concert with the 29th Infantry Division and supporting units they fought their way overland, relieving the embattled defenders of Pointe du Hoc on 8 June.

After a period of security, reserve and retraining, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Bat-

talion was attached to the 29th Infantry Division for the assault on Brest. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and the principal German submarine base in France. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was to secure the right flank of the 29th Infantry Division, seize the Lochrist Battery with its 280mm guns, and clear the Le Conquet Peninsula. After fierce fighting the battalion accomplished each of these objectives, at times in concert with the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). The fighting for Hill 63 was particularly savage, and the capture of the Lochrist Battery particularly daring.

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed into the tough fighting for the Hurtgen Forest. In a particularly noteworthy engagement it secured Bergstein and nearby Castle Hill (Hill 400), and then defended them against furious counterattacks while under heavy artillery fire. The battalion moved on to cross the Roer and the Rhine Rivers, and in concert with the 102nd Cavalry Group formed a combined arms force to cover the V Corps advance into Germany. When the war in Europe ended, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion had secured the major German maneuver area at Grafenwohr and pushed contingents into Czechoslovakia.

Seventy-six soldiers from the 2nd Ranger Infantry battalion are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission Cemeteries: thirty-nine in Normandy, twelve in Henri-Chapelle, twelve in the Netherlands, eleven in Brittany, and two in Cambridge. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion earned the Presidential Unit Citation, the French Croix de Guerre and the British Military Medal in World War II.

### Savage fighting on OMAHA

The 1st Infantry Division (the “Big Red One”) and the 29th Infantry Division (the “Blue and Gray”), accompanied by the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion and other units, assault landed onto Omaha Beach on 6 June, 1944. Seas were choppy and cross currents strong, and many landing craft came ashore some distance from where they had intended. German resistance was well organized, well emplaced and determined. The Germans had constructed an imposing array of beach obstacles, and the shingle itself was largely impassable to vehicles. American units found themselves intermingled, exposed and under heavy fire. Amidst this confusion junior and intermediate level leaders asserted

themselves, and restored momentum to the attack. Soldiers in small groups clawed their way through the defenses, across the beaches and onto the bluffs overlooking the landings. Some turned aside to outflank German defenders blocking the few draws capable of passing vehicles from the beaches to higher ground. One such draw critical to the relief of Pointe du Hoc was at Vierville, secured by the combined efforts of the 116th Infantry Regiment and the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion. Fighting on through the night, by the morning of 7 June both divisions were astride the highway along the bluffs above the beach, and positioned to bring further vehicles and reinforcements ashore. The attacking forces had taken 2,000 casualties on the first day.

## 5th Ranger Battalion

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On June 6, 1944 - D-Day - the 5th Ranger Battalion came ashore on Omaha Beach. Original plans were for it land at the Pointe du Hoc to reinforce the 2nd Ranger Battalion, but it diverted to Omaha when it did not receive a signal indicating the 2nd was successfully ashore by the appointed time. The 5th Ranger Battalion's alternate mission was to attack overland to secure the Pointe du Hoc. German resistance on Omaha Beach was determined, and the American assault there pinned down. In this chaos Brigadier General Norman Cota of the 29th Infantry Division famously exclaimed "Rangers lead the way!" - now the Ranger motto -- and the embattled Rangers pressed forward under heavy fire as the vanguard of the advance off the beaches. The battalion broke through to seize Vierville on the first day. Beating back fierce German counterattacks, the 5th Ranger Battalion and accompanying units broke through to the Pointe

du Hoc and relieved the hard pressed 2nd Rangers on June 8, then pushed on to Grandcamp and Isigny.

After absorbing replacements, retraining and security duties, the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed to the assault on Brest beginning 29 August. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and long the principal German submarine base in France. Ranger patrols swiftly probed outlying defenses, compromising German positions on the high ground around Brest. The Rangers screened difficult terrain between units as the noose around Brest tightened. In the grinding attack the Rangers were assigned some of the most formidable missions, seizing critical forts, pillboxes and positions in carefully coordinated combined arms assaults. In the savage fighting for Brest the battalion killed 624 and captured 2114, while suffering 137 casualties itself.

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## V Corps

V Corps was a headquarters designed to command and control from two to five divisions and supporting units. United States Infantry divisions averaged 14,000, and their supporting elements could average half again as many. Thus a corps could command as many as 100,000. On D-Day V Corps commanded and controlled the 1st Infantry Division and the 29th Infantry Division attacking Omaha Beach, in addition to two divisions in reserve as follow on forces. The World War II V Corps was activated on 20 October 1941, and shipped overseas on 23 January 1942. V Corps fought in the Normandy, Northern France, Ardennes-Alsace, Rhineland and Central Europe Campaigns. Major General Leonard T. Gerow commanded V Corps from 15 July 1943 to 14 January 1945. A Fifth Corps served in the Civil War and the Spanish American War, and the World War I progenitor of V Corps activated in France in July 1917.

## Rudder's Command Post

At 0745 Colonel James E. Rudder's moved his command post from the beach under the cliffs to a crater next to the German RL 409A 37mm antiaircraft bunker on the eastern edge of the Pointe du Hoc. The bunker seems to have been destroyed by a direct hit from one the USS Satterlee's 5-inch guns just as the three companies of 2nd Ranger Battalion landed on the narrow beach. Rudder himself was observed by his communications officer, Lt James "Ike" Eikner, to have had "the living hell scared out of him" by the falling concrete and debris. The debris from the collapsed cliff did form a large mound that aided the Rangers in their climb. It later helped as supplies and ammunition were carried aloft to the beleaguered Rangers.

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## 155mm Gun

155 GPF FILLOUX, model K 418, range 19,5 KM.

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Barrel length: 5915 mm. The mount allowed a traverse range of 30 degrees each way and an elevation from 0 to +35 degrees.

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Sgt. William Boyd, E Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

The first night we had a tough fight. In fact, they beat us back a little bit, my company. And we lost a couple men. I think one guy got killed, a couple got wounded. But they was just too many of them. I mean, just shooting at anything that moved. There was a lot of cattle and horses running loose too. And we had to watch out for the French people, there wasn't too many there, but we had to watch. But then, the next morning we took the area back again.

Sgt. Frank South, HQ Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion



The plans were that we would be relieved in about four hours by the 5th Rangers and by the rest of the 2nd. Well that was a little bit wrong. But we were wondering when they would get there. Not if they would get there, but when they would get there. Ace Parker was from the 5th rangers, his patrol did get to us eventually that day, that night. And the word went out that they were here, which was a big morale boost.

#### 7 June, 0300: Germans Press Counterattacks

By this point, the Germans recognize that time is against them, and that daylight favors American air, artillery and naval gunfire. They determine to overwhelm the Rangers on Pointe du Hoc with night attacks before the defenders are relieved. By nightfall over a third of the one hundred and eighty Rangers ashore at Pointe du Hoc were casualties, and ammunition is so low that many have taken to using captured German weapons.

The first German attack comes against the southwest corner of the Ranger positions across the highway, shortly before midnight. This is beaten back after an ammunition dump behind the Germans explodes and thus exposes the attackers. A second attack almost overruns the Rangers, but then collapses due to heavy German casualties and confusion. The Rangers now determine it is wise to withdraw and consolidate upon Pointe du Hoc when a third attack, launched at about 0300, finally overwhelms their thinly held forward positions. Fifty Rangers make it back to the Pointe du Hoc defenses. A dozen stay and hide south of the coastal highway.

#### First German attack

##### Nighttime attack: 2330

In the late afternoon of 6 June Generalleutnant Dietrich Kraiss, the commander of the German 352th Infantry Division, ordered counterattacks against American lines south of the coastal highway. At 2330 about 40 troops from the 1./914th Grenadier Regiment probed the forward positions of the Rangers of E Company, led by Lieutenant Kerchner. This action was close to the positions

of the by then destroyed 155mm guns. Despite a nearly full moon, the Rangers found visibility poor and were surprised by the German attack. However, E Company's sparsely held line of 30 rangers in a hedgerow beat back the Germans in a fierce firefight.

## Second attack

### Nighttime attack: 0100

At about 0100 the German 914th Grenadier Regiment made a stronger effort, attacking from the south and southwest against the right flank of Company E. The attack opened with loud whistles and an exchange of German names shouted out down the line. This shouting was followed by heavy fires from machine guns and machine pistols and incoming grenades thrown at the Rangers. The Germans had approached within 50 meters of the Rangers without being detected, and caused heavy casualties. The Rangers nevertheless held, using captured German grenades and their own BARs. A number of German soldiers were captured.

## Third attack

### Nighttime attack: 0300

A third German attack, much more concentrated than those prior, occurred at 0300. This attack came into the center of the Ranger line near a command post the Ranger contingents south of the coastal highway had improvised to coordinate their sector. This attack developed with whistles and roll calls followed by heavy machine gun and rifle fire. German mortar fire increased in volume and pressure continued to mount. The Rangers of E and F Company were now using captured weapons and grenades, and an increasing number were wounded. This third German attack finally overwhelmed the outlying defenses, and about 20 Rangers were captured. The contingents from E and F Companies and a platoon from the 5th Ranger Battalion had planned to withdraw if too severely pressed. About 45 Rangers exfiltrated under the cover of darkness across the coastal highway and made their way back to the main Ranger defensive line on the Pointe du Hoc. Here they fought on until relieved two days later

## Rudder's Command Post

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At this point, Colonel Rudder's communications were intermittent. His connection with higher command was a signal light EE-84 that allowed him to direct naval gunfire -- crucial to the survival of the Rangers on the Pointe du Hoc. The command post itself became the focus of several remarkable photos taken during the battle. One of the most famous shots includes an American flag draped over the rocks. The flag was placed for the pragmatic purpose of identifying the Rangers to aggressive low-flying American P47 fighter pilots more so than for patriotic display. The prisoners seen on the upper level in the photo were German soldiers and Italian laborers whose distinctive white hats can also be seen in images of prisoners being taken aboard the battleship, USS Texas. Col James Rudder himself appears in top right corner of the photo watching the prisoners being taken away. Sitting on the huge concrete block to the left of the picture is Ranger Cpl. Lou Lisko.

## 155mm Gun

155 GPF FILLOUX, model K 418, range 19,5 KM.

Put into service by the French in 1917, it was taken into service by the U.S. Army as a 155 mm gun (M1918 M1) the by field artillery. It remained in service until the beginning of WWII. In 1940 the French had about 450 canons in

stock, the greater part taken by the Wehrmacht at the Armistice as the 15.5 cm FeldKanone. They were dispersed along coastal defenses as of 1942.

Barrel length: 5915 mm. The mount allowed a traverse range of 30 degrees each way and an elevation from 0 to +35 degrees.

The gun fired explosive rounds with a muzzle velocity of 735 m/sec. The maximum shot range was 19,500 meters.

Sgt. Frank South, HQ Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

We were being counterattacked, we were taking casualties. Yeah, we were worried. But, I remember that night, one of the other guys and I went out just outside the aid station where we're still protected from direct fire and sort of discussed, "Well, my God, what'll we do if we're overcome?" You can't worry, I mean there's no point in worrying. That doesn't sound right. It's not that you don't sit down and reason, "I'm not going to worry," it's the fact that you have other things on your mind which are more important than worrying and such.

7 June, 1100: Relief Column Reaches St. Pierre du Mont

A relief column consisting of A, B and C companies of the 2nd Rangers, the full 5th Ranger Battalion, the 1st Battalion of the 116th Infantry, and six Sherman tanks of B Company of the 743rd Tank Battalion fight its way into the village of St. Pierre du Mont, a mere thousand meters from the embattled Rangers at Pointe du Hoc.

The Rangers there are now down to less than a hundred combatants, many of these badly wounded. They defend a perimeter only two hundred meters deep by five hundred wide.

A dozen Rangers are still at large south of the coastal highway. Captured enemy equipment and ammunition has been incorporated into the defense, and the defenders benefit from episodes of effective supporting naval gunfire.

However, the German units that have attacked so desperately to drive the

Americans from Pointe du Hoc are by this time spent, exhausted by the vicious combat and their heavy casualties.

A, B and C companies

## 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion

### World War II Combat Chronicle

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion activated on 1 April, 1943, in Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Rangers are highly trained volunteers, and Ranger battalions are intended for such specialized missions as scouting, screening, raiding, ambushing and spearheading attacks or invasions with assaults on key terrain. In World War II American Rangers were heavily influenced by British Commandos, and borrowed many tactics, techniques and procedures from them. In December, 1943, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion deployed to Bude, England, and prepared for participation in Operation OVERLORD.

On June 6, 1944 – D-Day – the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion attacked to seize the dominant cliff-bound Pointe du Hoc and destroy German heavy guns positioned there. The guns were positioned in such a manner that they could disrupt landings at both Omaha and Utah Beaches, and had the highest single priority for pre-invasion targets. Despite delay, disruption and casualties in getting ashore, the Rangers assisted by rocket propelled ropes and ladders climb the cliffs while under fire and had parties on top within fifteen minutes. These formed up into ever larger groups as more and more men made it to the top, and moved on to designated targets. The guns had been moved from their initial prepared positions, but the Rangers nevertheless tracked them down and destroyed them. They pushed on to cut the coastal highway behind Pointe du Hoc, and beat back furious German counterattacks to secure their gains. Meanwhile a contingent of the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion and the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion had fought their way ashore onto Omaha Beach. In concert with the 29th Infantry Division and supporting units they fought their way overland, relieving the embattled defenders of Pointe du Hoc on 8 June. After a period of security, reserve and retraining, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was attached to the 29th Infantry Division for the assault on Brest. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and the principal German submarine base in France. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was to secure the right flank

of the 29th Infantry Division, seize the Lochrist Battery with its 280mm guns, and clear the Le Conquet Peninsula. After fierce fighting the battalion accomplished each of these objectives, at times in concert with the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). The fighting for Hill 63 was particularly savage, and the capture of the Lochrist Battery particularly daring.

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed into the tough fighting for the Hurtgen Forest. In a particularly noteworthy engagement it secured Bergstein and nearby Castle Hill (Hill 400), and then defended them against furious counterattacks while under heavy artillery fire. The battalion moved on to cross the Roer and the Rhine Rivers, and in concert with the 102nd Cavalry Group formed a combined arms force to cover the V Corps advance into Germany. When the war in Europe ended, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion had secured the major German maneuver area at Grafenwohr and pushed contingents into Czechoslovakia.

Seventy-six soldiers from the 2nd Ranger Infantry battalion are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission Cemeteries: thirty-nine in Normandy, twelve in Henri-Chapelle, twelve in the Netherlands, eleven in Brittany, and two in Cambridge. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion earned the Presidential Unit Citation, the French Croix de Guerre and the British Military Medal in World War II.

## 5th Ranger Battalion

### 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion

#### World War II Combat Chronicle

The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion activated on 1 September 1943 in Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Ranger battalions are all-volunteer, and designed for such specialized missions as scouting, screening, raiding, ambushing and spearheading assaults with attacks on key terrain. In World War II American Rangers were heavily influenced by British Commandos, and borrowed tactics, techniques and procedures from them. After intense training the battalion shipped to Leominster, England, and undertook further training in England and Scotland for its role in Operation OVERLORD.

On June 6, 1944 – D-Day – the 5th Ranger Battalion came ashore on Omaha Beach. Original plans were for it land at the Pointe du Hoc to reinforce the 2nd

Ranger Battalion, but it diverted to Omaha when it did not receive a signal indicating the 2nd was successfully ashore by the appointed time. The 5th Ranger Battalion's alternate mission was to attack overland to secure the Pointe du Hoc. German resistance on Omaha Beach was determined, and the American assault there pinned down. In this chaos Brigadier General Norman Cota of the 29th Infantry Division famously exclaimed "Rangers lead the way!" - now the Ranger motto -- and the embattled Rangers pressed forward under heavy fire as the vanguard of the advance off the beaches. The battalion broke through to seize Vierville on the first day. Beating back fierce German counterattacks, the 5th Ranger Battalion and accompanying units broke through to the Pointe du Hoc and relieved the hard pressed 2nd Rangers on June 8, then pushed on to Grandcamp and Isigny.

After absorbing replacements, retraining and security duties, the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed to the assault on Brest beginning 29 August. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and long the principal German submarine base in France. Ranger patrols swiftly probed outlying defenses, compromising German positions on the high ground around Brest. The Rangers screened difficult terrain between units as the noose around Brest tightened. In the grinding attack the Rangers were assigned some of the most formidable missions, seizing critical forts, pillboxes and positions in carefully coordinated combined arms assaults. In the savage fighting for Brest the battalion killed 624 and captured 2114, while suffering 137 casualties itself.

The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion secured the 12th Army Group Headquarters at Arlon, Belgium during October and November 1944, and then was attached to the Sixth Cavalry Group during savage fighting from Diesen to Ludweiler in Germany. During the German Ardennes Offensive the battalion defended St. Avold, and several times secured sectors over 10,000 meters across - appropriate to a division. In February 1945 the 5th Rangers crossed the Saar River, infiltrated behind German lines, and established a blocking position near Zerf to trap retreating enemy and block reinforcements. This precipitated a savage nine day battle that crushed enemy resistance in the area, opening a route to the Rhine. Once across the Rhine the battalion cleared assigned sectors, participated in the race to the Danube, and ended the war in Pocking, Germany. Sixty-seven Rangers from the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion are buried in American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries: twenty-three in Luxembourg, fourteen in Normandy, thirteen in Brittany, eleven in Lorraine, two in

Epinal, and one each in the Ardennes, Cambridge, Henri-Chapelle and North Africa. The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion earned two Distinguished Unit Citations and the French Croix de Guerre during World War II.

## 1st Battalion of the 116th Infantry

### 116th Infantry Regiment

#### World War II Campaign Chronicle

The 116th Infantry Regiment was a constituent unit of the 29th Infantry Division – the “Blue and Gray Division” – during World War II. The regiment traced its roots to Virginia Militia organized in 1742 that fought the French and Indians, and later the British during the American Revolution. During the Civil War this militia served under General Thomas J. Jackson in the famous “Stonewall” Brigade. During World War I it was reorganized into the 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division, and saw significant combat in France. In February 1941 the 116th Infantry Regiment and 29th Infantry Division, now National Guard, were called into Federal Service.

The 116th Infantry Regiment assault landed onto Omaha Beach on 6 June, 1944. Seas were choppy and cross currents strong. Many landing craft came ashore far from where they had intended. German resistance, supported by significant obstacles, was organized and determined. American units were intermingled, exposed and under heavy fire. Nevertheless the soldiers clawed their way onto bluffs overlooking the beaches and outflanked the draw at Vierville-sur-Mer, capable of passing vehicles to higher ground. The 116th pushed on with the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion and 743rd Tank Battalion to relieve the embattled 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion defending the critical Pointe du Hoc, captured in a daring assault up the cliffs from the sea. The 116th supported the attack that seized Isigny and closed to the Vire River. The 29th Infantry Division linked up with the 101st Airborne Division near Carentan on 10 June, and by 12 June Omaha and Utah Beaches were a continuous front behind which the American buildup continued.

The 116th Infantry Regiment pushed on through difficult bocage terrain and thickening German opposition towards the strategic town of St. Lo. The regiment participated in the fierce fighting to secure the Martinville Ridge, key terrain overlooking St. Lo. A battalion of the 116th pushed within 1,000 meters



of the town on 15 July, but became cut off. A relieving battalion of the 116th commanded by Major Thomas D. Howie broke through to them, but Howie was killed when the combined units continued their advance. The 29th Infantry Division finally secured St. Lo on 18 July, and laid Howie's flag-draped coffin on the rubble-buried pediment of Ste. Croix Church, a poignant symbol of courage and sacrifice.

On 29 July, as the Operation COBRA breakout offensive sped towards Avranches and points beyond, the 29th Infantry Division with the 116th Infantry Regiment leading attacked along COBRA's left shoulder to broaden the offensive and secure its flank. Near Tessy-sur-Vire, Villebaudon and Percy the division collided with the German 2nd and 116th Panzer Divisions. These were the only significant German armored forces proximate to the breakthrough, and were rolling west in a desperate effort to plug the emerging gap. Instead the 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments tied them into a roiling mobile battle that ultimately favored the Americans.

The 116th Infantry Regiment secured Hill 219, high ground west of Vire, and then swept into that town using underbrush and ravines to cover their approach. After house to house fighting they secured Vire on 7 August. The regiment then joined in the destruction of German forces within the "Falaise Pocket", formed when General George S. Patton's Third Army encircled numerous enemy forces in the aftermath of COBRA. The 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments advanced as far as Tinchebray before being pinched out by British forces crossing its front as the pocket disappeared. The 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments redeployed to the Brittany Campaign and the attack on Brest, a base for German U-Boats that wreaked havoc on Allied shipping. Brest was heavily fortified and stoutly defended, requiring a prolonged and deliberate siege to secure. The 29th Infantry Division closed up on enemy defenses within its sector and launched a major attack on 25 August – the day other Allied forces liberated Paris. The 116th Infantry Regiment particularly distinguished itself in savage fighting for Fort Montbary, employing tons of explosives and attached British flame-throwing "Crocodile" tanks to knock out enemy casemates. After further heavy fighting, Brest fell on 18 September.

The 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments redeployed over 200 miles to the German border. In October the 116th Infantry Regiment took part in fierce fighting around Aachen, the first German city to fall to the Allies. The

division then pushed on to the Roer River, and held that line during the German Ardennes offensive from December through January 1945. The 29th Infantry Division forced the Roer and advanced through Munchen-Gladbach, and the 116th participated in mopping up the Ruhr Pocket in April. The 29th Infantry Division then pushed on to the Elbe River, and linked up with advancing Russian forces on 2 May. The division was deactivated from federal service and reactivated in a National Guard status in 1946.

The 116th Infantry Regiment earned two Presidential Unit Citations, a Meritorious Unit Citation and two French Croix de Guerre during World War II. A total of 786 of its World War II Soldiers are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries in Europe.

## Sherman tanks

### M4 Sherman medium tank

The iconic American tank of World War II, the M4 Sherman was employed in all theaters of the conflict by the US Army and Marine Corps, as well as most Allied nations. Considered a medium tank, the Sherman initially mounted a 75mm gun and had a crew of five. In addition, the M4 chassis served as the platform for several derivative armored vehicles such as tank retrievers, tank destroyers, and self-propelled artillery. Christened “Sherman” by the British, who named their US-built tanks after American Civil War generals, the designation quickly caught on with American forces.

During its 50,000-unit production run, the US Army built seven principle variations of the M4 Sherman. These were the M4, M4A1, M4A2, M4A3, M4A4, M4A5, and M4A6. These variations did not represent a linear improvement of the vehicle, but rather references to changes in engine type, production location, or fuel type. As the tank was produced, a variety of improvements were introduced such as a heavier, high velocity 76mm gun, “wet” ammunition storage, a more powerful engine, and thicker armor.

In addition, numerous variations of the basic medium tank were built. These included a number of Shermans mounted with a 105mm howitzer instead of the usual 75mm gun, as well as the M4A3E2 Jumbo Sherman. Featuring a heavier turret and armor, the Jumbo Sherman was designed for assaulting fortifications and aiding in breaking out of Normandy. Other popular variations includ-

ed Shermans equipped with Duplex Drive for amphibious operations and those armed with the R3 flame thrower.

Entering combat in October 1942, the first Shermans saw action with the British Army at the Second Battle of El Alamein. The first US Shermans saw combat the following month in North Africa. As the North Africa campaign progressed, M4s and M4A1s replaced the older M3 Lee in most American armor formations. These two variants were the principle versions in use until the introduction of the popular 500 hp M4A3 in late 1944. When the Sherman first entered service, it was superior to the German tanks it faced in North Africa and remained at least on par with the medium Panzer IV series throughout the war.

With the landings in Normandy in June 1944, it was found that the Sherman's 75mm gun was incapable of penetrating the front armor of the heavier German Panther and Tiger tanks. This led to the rapid introduction of the high velocity 76mm gun. Even with this upgrade, it was found that the Sherman was only capable of defeating the Panther and Tiger at close range or from the flank. Utilizing superior tactics and working in conjunction with tank destroyers, American armor units were able overcome this handicap and achieved favorable results on the battlefield.

Weight: 33.4 tons

Length: 19 ft., 2 in.; Width: 8 ft., 7 in.; Height: 9 ft.

Armor: 19-91 mm

Main Gun: 75 mm (later 76 mm)

Secondary Armament: 1 x .50 cal. Browning M2HB machine gun, 2 x .30

Browning M1919A4 machine gun

Engine: 400 hp Continental R975-C1 (Gasoline); Range: 120 mile; Speed: 24 mph

B Company of the 743rd Tank Battalion

743rd Tank Battalion

World War II Combat Chronicle

The triangular infantry division of World War II consisted of infantry regiments, artillery battalions, and the minimal representation from other branches it

would consistently use. In demanding circumstances separate battalions of appropriate types reinforced it. The 743rd Tank Battalion was such a separate battalion, bringing the mobility, fire power and shock action of armor to the divisions it reinforced.

The 743rd Tank Battalion was attached to the 30th Infantry Division from 1 March 1944 through 23 June 1945, but was subordinated to the 29th Infantry Division 6-14 June and assaulted Omaha Beach on D-Day. Two of its companies had been equipped with amphibious duplex drive (DD) tanks, but its sister 741st Tank Battalion warned it of having lost many such tanks swamped in the rough seas. The 743rd landed by LST instead. The tanks proved invaluable in reducing German beachhead defenses, and many reinforced the Navy Special Engineer Task Forces clearing gaps through formidable obstacles. The battalion forced the draw at St. Laurent-sur-Mer, and its tanks led attacks inland from hotly contested Omaha Beach. Famously, the 743rd Tank Battalion formed the armored spearhead in the relief of Pointe du Hoc, critical terrain seized by the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion on D-Day and held by them for two days in the face of savage German counterattacks. The 743rd Tank Battalion won the Distinguished Unit Citation for its exemplary performance of duty on 6 June 1944.

Reunited with the 30th Infantry Division on 15 June, the 743rd Tank Battalion forced the Vire River and Taute-Vire Canal and seized the village of St. Jean-de-Daye. On 11 July a German armored division counter-attacked, but was beaten back in fierce close quarters fighting. The 743rd and 30th pressed on to seize the ridgeline at Hauts-Vents and the bridge at Pont-Hebert, then led in the attack for Operation COBRA, the major breakout offensive. They followed up on devastating "carpet bombing" on 25 July to seize the village of Hebecrevon, secure bridges along the Vire River and clear routes for the passage of exploiting armored combat commands.

After seizing Troisgots and Tessy-sur-Vire, the 743rd and 30th redeployed to secure newly seized Mortain. They had barely arrived when the Germans launched a major counter-attack on 7 August, hoping to reach the sea at Avranches and cut off General George S. Patton's rapidly advancing Third Army. The Americans doggedly held on to nearby Hill 314 and other key terrain. The 743rd lent its firepower to the determined infantrymen, and the German attack failed with heavy losses.

The 743rd and 30th captured Domfort as Allied forces trapped Germans in the

Falaise “Pocket”, and closed another encirclement at Louviers along the Eure River. They secured Fort Eban Emael on 10 September, and advanced through Maastricht and Heerlen to attack the Siegfried Line. Penetrating it, they linked up with the 1st Infantry Division to encircle Aachen, and pressed on to the Inde River. On 17 December they redeployed to block the German Ardennes offensive through Malmedy and Stavelot, then counterattacked in January. They forced the Rhine on 24 March 1945, and rolled on through Hamelin, Braunschweig and Magdeburg to contact the Russians on 17 April.

Ninety-six Soldiers from the 743rd Tank Battalion are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries: thirty-two in Normandy, twenty-seven in the Netherlands, sixteen in Henri-Chapelle, ten in Cambridge, seven in Brittany, and one each in Lorraine, Luxembourg and the Rhone. Constituent units of the 743rd Tank Battalion earned two Meritorious Unit Citations.

## St. Pierre du Mont

St. Pierre du Mont is a small Norman village located on the coastal highway D514 between Grandcamp and Vierville. It has a population of 99 people and is famous for its chateau. It was the scene of tough fighting for the relief column approaching Point du Hoc.

## Naval gunfire

### Naval Support in the Battle of Pointe du Hoc

Naval support proved crucial in the battle for Pointe du Hoc, first in getting the Rangers ashore, and then in providing them artillery fires. British Admiral Bertram H. Ramsay commanded the naval forces for Operation NEPTUNE—the naval component of the Normandy invasion. Under Ramsay in the direct chain of command were American Rear Admiral Alan G. Kirk, commanding the Western Task Force designated to undertake the amphibious landings on the American beaches “Omaha” and “Utah,” and British Rear Admiral Philip L. Vian, the commander of the Eastern Task Force ordered to carry out the assaults on the British and Canadian beaches “Juno,” “Gold,” and “Sword.” Ves-

sels committed to the operation included 1,213 naval combatants, 4,126 landing ships and craft, 736 ancillary ships and craft, and 864 merchant ships. The Western Task Force, responsible for Omaha Beach, supported the assault on Pointe du Hoc as well.

Rear Admiral Alan G. Kirk's Western Task Force consisted of three components: Task Force 124, commanded by Rear Admiral John L. Hall, USN in the amphibious command ship USS Ancon, assigned to the assault on Omaha Beach; Task Force 125, commanded by Rear Admiral Don P. Moon, USN in the attack transport USS Bayfield, assigned to the assault on Utah Beach; and Task Force 126, the Follow-up Force commanded by Commodore Campbell D. Edgar, USN in the destroyer escort USS Maloy. Task Force 124 was responsible for Pointe du Hoc and convoyed the Rangers across the English Channel. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion embarked on the HMS Prince Charles, the SS Amsterdam and the SS Ben My Chree. The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion embarked on the HMS Prince Leopold, the HMS Prince Baudouin, and the SS Maud. The assault convoys reached their allotted sectors off the Normandy beaches before dawn on 6 June, despite squalls and high waves en route.

The landings on the Pointe du Hoc were scheduled to begin at 0630. German guns began firing at the American battleship Arkansas, the oldest battleship in the U.S. Navy, at 0530 and targeted American destroyers off Omaha five minutes later. Soon the American warships were returning fire. At 0550 the battleship USS Texas, the flagship of Rear Admiral Carleton F. Bryant, USN, the commander of the Omaha bombardment group, began her pre-landing naval gunfire. Aiming her 14-inch guns at the Pointe du Hoc, she sent huge chunks of rock from the cliff sailing into the air. The furious naval bombardment continued as the Rangers boarded their landing craft and sped to the beaches. Bombarding Force C, supporting Omaha Beach and the Pointe du Hoc landings, consisted of:

USS Texas (Battleship)

USS Arkansas (Battleship)

HMS Glasgow (Cruiser)

FFS Montcalm (French) (Cruiser)

FFS Georges Leygues (French) (Cruiser)

USS McCook (Destroyer)

USS Carmick (Destroyer)

USS Doyle (Destroyer)

USS Baldwin (Destroyer)  
USS Harding (Destroyer)  
USS Frankford (Destroyer)  
USS Satterlee (Destroyer)  
USS Thompson (Destroyer)  
USS Emmons (Destroyer)  
HMS Melbreak (Destroyer)  
HMS Tanatside (Destroyer)  
HMS Talybont (Destroyer)

The naval bombardment lifted and shifted at 0625 in anticipation of the Rangers coming ashore. Unfortunately the landing force had become misdirected en route to the Pointe du Hoc, and arrived over thirty minutes late. This afforded the Germans time to get out of bunkers they had weathered the bombardment in and back to firing positions on the cliffs. Sensing this danger, the destroyer USS Satterlee sped within two hundred yards of the shoreline and lashed the cliff tops with fire from her 5-inch and 40mm guns. This welcome fire support collaterally dropped portions of the cliffs to create talus mounds that some of the Rangers exploited in their climbs to the top. A joint Army-Navy fire-control party ashore with radio and signal lamp communications clambered up the cliffs with the Rangers, and quickly enhanced the discrimination and accuracy of the naval fires. The Satterlee destroyed a number of firing positions impeding the advance, and then helped the Rangers beat back fierce counterattacks. Other ships joined in this close up fire support off the Pointe du Hoc, and rotated as they exhausted their ammunition. The battle for the Pointe du Hoc raged for three days, notably supported by heavy and accurate fires from the USS Satterlee, Thompson, and Harding and from the HMS Talybont. On 7 June welcome re-supply arrived by LCVP, and casualties and prisoner were evacuated on the same vessels. On 8 June a relief column fought its way in to the Pointe du Hoc from Omaha Beach. Throughout the battle for the Pointe du Hoc, naval support had proven essential to the success of the Rangers ashore.

#### Rudder's Command Post

At 0745 Colonel James E. Rudder's moved his command post from the beach



under the cliffs to a crater next to the German RL 409A 37mm antiaircraft bunker on the eastern edge of the Pointe du Hoc. The bunker seems to have been destroyed by a direct hit from one the USS Satterlee's 5-inch guns just as the three companies of 2nd Ranger Battalion landed on the narrow beach. Rudder himself was observed by his communications officer, Lt James "Ike" Eikner, to have had "the living hell scared out of him" by the falling concrete and debris. The debris from the collapsed cliff did form a large mound that aided the Rangers in their climb. It later helped as supplies and ammunition were carried aloft to the beleaguered Rangers.

At this point, Colonel Rudder's communications were intermittent. His connection with higher command was a signal light EE-84 that allowed him to direct naval gunfire -- crucial to the survival of the Rangers on the Pointe du Hoc. The command post itself became the focus of several remarkable photos taken during the battle. One of the most famous shots includes an American flag draped over the rocks. The flag was placed for the pragmatic purpose of identifying the Rangers to aggressive low-flying American P47 fighter pilots more so than for patriotic display. The prisoners seen on the upper level in the photo were German soldiers and Italian laborers whose distinctive white hats can also be seen in images of prisoners being taken aboard the battleship, USS Texas. Col James Rudder himself appears in top right corner of the photo watching the prisoners being taken away. Sitting on the huge concrete block to the left of the picture is Ranger Cpl. Lou Lisko.

155mm gun

155 GPF FILLOUX, model K 418, range 19,5 KM.

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Barrel length: 5915 mm. The mount allowed a traverse range of 30 degrees each way and an elevation from 0 to +35 degrees.

The gun fired explosive rounds with a muzzle velocity of 735 m/sec. The maxi-



mum shot range was 19,500 meters.

Sgt. Frank South, HQ Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

After a while we were getting a little hungry. The only thing we had to eat was those god-awful D-Ration bars. So, we were limited in water and such. But we were a little concerned about it. The other thing that was happening is that we were running out of ammunition, and it had to be rationed. So, that was one of the problems, the guys were using captured Mauser rifles and German ammunition. And this caused us a problem when the guys from the 5th started arriving. They would hear our Mauser fire, and you can recognize the sound, it's a different sound from our M1s, and so they thought these were Germans, and so a minor firefight broke out and two of the, I think it was two of the 5th rangers were killed by friendly fire.

Cpt. John Raaen Jr., HQ Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

The 2nd rangers were now running point for this operation. And they had gotten to within sight of Grandcamp almost, the tanks got there to where they could see the outskirts of Grandcamp, but the 2nd never got there. And they'd run into some pretty heavy resistance, but according to the rules they pushed right on by it and let the tanks come up and solve the resistance. But now, the tanks were stopped by a huge crater in the road, flanked by mine-fields. So the infantry was operating up front, and they were only a thousand yards from Pointe du Hoc. I went up to the crater and got the story that no tank had been past it. And just then, Sullivan called me up and said, "They're calling the tanks back to Vierville. They're afraid of German armor that's been moving." And we got the company commanders in and we laid out the defensive positions, which I was told to do. Hold Saint Pierre du Mont for the night. And it was terrible. We were only fifteen-hundred yards from Pointe du Hoc. But, we disposed the companies around and prepared for something awful to happen and nothing awful did.

## 8 June, 1200: Relief Column Reaches Pointe du Hoc

The relief column now reinforced by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 116th Infantry, and the remainder of the 743rd Tank Battalion, fights its way onto Pointe du Hoc, relieves the embattled Rangers, and clears the terrain en route. Enemy artillery had been suppressed or pushed back by counter-battery fire and the pace of the advance. By the time of their relief, the Rangers defending Pointe du Hoc have received a small but encouraging seaborne infusion of supplies brought in over the cliffs from LCVs and DUKWs the previous evening.

Allied columns now push on to unite all of the Normandy beachheads, squeezing out German positions caught in between them.

By 12 June all five of the Allied beaches are linked together to establish a continuous lodgment. Troops, vehicles, ammunition and other supplies pour into this lodgment over the next days and weeks, building up into a force capable of breaking out of Normandy, liberating France, and carrying the war into Hitler's Germany.

Now visit The Normandy Campaign: the Advance Inland

## 116th Infantry

### 116th Infantry Regiment

#### World War II Campaign Chronicle

The 116th Infantry Regiment was a constituent unit of the 29th Infantry Division – the “Blue and Gray Division” – during World War II. The regiment traced its roots to Virginia Militia organized in 1742 that fought the French and Indians, and later the British during the American Revolution. During the Civil War this militia served under General Thomas J. Jackson in the famous “Stonewall” Brigade. During World War I it was reorganized into the 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division, and saw significant combat in France. In February 1941 the 116th Infantry Regiment and 29th Infantry Division, now National Guard, were called into Federal Service.

The 116th Infantry Regiment assault landed onto Omaha Beach on 6 June, 1944. Seas were choppy and cross currents strong. Many landing craft came ashore far from where they had intended. German resistance, supported by significant obstacles, was organized and determined. American units were intermingled, exposed and under heavy fire. Nevertheless the soldiers clawed their way onto bluffs overlooking the beaches and outflanked the draw at Vierville-sur-Mer, capable of passing vehicles to higher ground. The 116th pushed on with the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion and 743rd Tank Battalion to relieve the embattled 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion defending the critical Pointe du Hoc, captured in a daring assault up the cliffs from the sea. The 116th supported the attack that seized Isigny and closed to the Vire River. The 29th Infantry Division linked up with the 101st Airborne Division near Carentan on 10 June, and by 12 June Omaha and Utah Beaches were a continuous front behind which the American buildup continued.

The 116th Infantry Regiment pushed on through difficult bocage terrain and thickening German opposition towards the strategic town of St. Lo. The regiment participated in the fierce fighting to secure the Martinville Ridge, key terrain overlooking St. Lo. A battalion of the 116th pushed within 1,000 meters of the town on 15 July, but became cut off. A relieving battalion of the 116th commanded by Major Thomas D. Howie broke through to them, but Howie was killed when the combined units continued their advance. The 29th Infantry Division finally secured St. Lo on 18 July, and laid Howie's flag-draped coffin on the rubble-buried pediment of Ste. Croix Church, a poignant symbol of courage and sacrifice.

On 29 July, as the Operation COBRA breakout offensive sped towards Avranches and points beyond, the 29th Infantry Division with the 116th Infantry Regiment leading attacked along COBRA's left shoulder to broaden the offensive and secure its flank. Near Tessy-sur-Vire, Villebaudon and Percy the division collided with the German 2nd and 116th Panzer Divisions. These were the only significant German armored forces proximate to the breakthrough, and were rolling west in a desperate effort to plug the emerging gap. Instead the 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments tied them into a roiling mobile battle that ultimately favored the Americans.

The 116th Infantry Regiment secured Hill 219, high ground west of Vire, and then swept into that town using underbrush and ravines to cover their approach. After house to house fighting they secured Vire on 7 August. The

regiment then joined in the destruction of German forces within the “Falaise Pocket”, formed when General George S. Patton’s Third Army encircled numerous enemy forces in the aftermath of COBRA. The 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments advanced as far as Tinchebray before being pinched out by British forces crossing its front as the pocket disappeared. The 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments redeployed to the Brittany Campaign and the attack on Brest, a base for German U-Boats that wreaked havoc on Allied shipping. Brest was heavily fortified and stoutly defended, requiring a prolonged and deliberate siege to secure. The 29th Infantry Division closed up on enemy defenses within its sector and launched a major attack on 25 August – the day other Allied forces liberated Paris. The 116th Infantry Regiment particularly distinguished itself in savage fighting for Fort Montbary, employing tons of explosives and attached British flame-throwing “Crocodile” tanks to knock out enemy casemates. After further heavy fighting, Brest fell on 18 September.

The 29th Infantry Division and its constituent regiments redeployed over 200 miles to the German border. In October the 116th Infantry Regiment took part in fierce fighting around Aachen, the first German city to fall to the Allies. The division then pushed on to the Roer River, and held that line during the German Ardennes offensive from December through January 1945. The 29th Infantry Division forced the Roer and advanced through Munchen-Gladbach, and the 116th participated in mopping up the Ruhr Pocket in April. The 29th Infantry Division then pushed on to the Elbe River, and linked up with advancing Russian forces on 2 May. The division was deactivated from federal service and reactivated in a National Guard status in 1946.

The 116th Infantry Regiment earned two Presidential Unit Citations, a Meritorious Unit Citation and two French Croix de Guerre during World War II. A total of 786 of its World War II Soldiers are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries in Europe.

## 743rd Tank Battalion

### World War II Combat Chronicle

The triangular infantry division of World War II consisted of infantry regiments, artillery battalions, and the minimal representation from other branches it would consistently use. In demanding circumstances separate battalions of

appropriate types reinforced it. The 743rd Tank Battalion was such a separate battalion, bringing the mobility, fire power and shock action of armor to the divisions it reinforced.

The 743rd Tank Battalion was attached to the 30th Infantry Division from 1 March 1944 through 23 June 1945, but was subordinated to the 29th Infantry Division 6-14 June and assaulted Omaha Beach on D-Day. Two of its companies had been equipped with amphibious duplex drive (DD) tanks, but its sister 741st Tank Battalion warned it of having lost many such tanks swamped in the rough seas. The 743rd landed by LST instead. The tanks proved invaluable in reducing German beachhead defenses, and many reinforced the Navy Special Engineer Task Forces clearing gaps through formidable obstacles. The battalion forced the draw at St. Laurent-sur-Mer, and its tanks led attacks inland from hotly contested Omaha Beach. Famously, the 743rd Tank Battalion formed the armored spearhead in the relief of Pointe du Hoc, critical terrain seized by the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion on D-Day and held by them for two days in the face of savage German counterattacks. The 743rd Tank Battalion won the Distinguished Unit Citation for its exemplary performance of duty on 6 June 1944.

Reunited with the 30th Infantry Division on 15 June, the 743rd Tank Battalion forced the Vire River and Taute-Vire Canal and seized the village of St. Jean-de-Daye. On 11 July a German armored division counter-attacked, but was beaten back in fierce close quarters fighting. The 743rd and 30th pressed on to seize the ridgeline at Hauts-Vents and the bridge at Pont-Hebert, then led in the attack for Operation COBRA, the major breakout offensive. They followed up on devastating "carpet bombing" on 25 July to seize the village of Hebecrevon, secure bridges along the Vire River and clear routes for the passage of exploiting armored combat commands.

After seizing Troisgots and Tessy-sur-Vire, the 743rd and 30th redeployed to secure newly seized Mortain. They had barely arrived when the Germans launched a major counter-attack on 7 August, hoping to reach the sea at Avranches and cut off General George S. Patton's rapidly advancing Third Army. The Americans doggedly held on to nearby Hill 314 and other key terrain. The 743rd lent its firepower to the determined infantrymen, and the German attack failed with heavy losses.

The 743rd and 30th captured Domfort as Allied forces trapped Germans in the Falaise "Pocket", and closed another encirclement at Louviers along the Eure

River. They secured Fort Eben Emael on 10 September, and advanced through Maastricht and Heerlen to attack the Siegfried Line. Penetrating it, they linked up with the 1st Infantry Division to encircle Aachen, and pressed on to the Inde River. On 17 December they redeployed to block the German Ardennes offensive through Malmedy and Stavelot, then counterattacked in January. They forced the Rhine on 24 March 1945, and rolled on through Hamelin, Braunschweig and Magdeburg to contact the Russians on 17 April.

Ninety-six Soldiers from the 743rd Tank Battalion are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries: thirty-two in Normandy, twenty-seven in the Netherlands, sixteen in Henri-Chapelle, ten in Cambridge, seven in Brittany, and one each in Lorraine, Luxembourg and the Rhone. Constituent units of the 743rd Tank Battalion earned two Meritorious Unit Citations.

## LCVPs

The LCVP was actually a modification of the Higgins Industries 'Eureka' boat, the Navy version of which was the LCPL. It was the most numerous of WWII's famous Higgins Boats.

It was basically constructed of wood, and was used in transporting fully armed troops, light vehicles, and other equipment and supplies essential to amphibious operations. It was these boats that made the D-Day landings at Normandy, Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and hundreds of lesser-known places possible.

The LCVP could land a platoon of 36 men with their equipment, or a jeep and 12 men, extract itself quickly, turn around without broaching in the surf, and go back out to get more troops and/or supplies. The 20,000+ Higgins boats manufactured by Higgins Industries and others licensed to use Higgins designs landed more Allied troops during the war than all other types of landing craft combined.

## DUKWs

The DUKW was an amphibious version of the 2-1/2 ton General Motors cargo truck. It was developed by the U. S. Army during World War II as a means to

deliver cargo from ships at sea, directly to shore.

The name comes from the model naming terminology used by General Motors Corporation; the D indicates a vehicle designed in 1942, the U means “utility (amphibious)”, the K indicated four-wheel drive and the W indicated two powered rear axles.

### Continuous Lodgment

Plans for Operation OVERLORD envisioned expanding the initial beachheads and linking them up in such a manner as to produce a continuous lodgment. Within this lodgment reinforcements and supplies would come ashore to sustain further phases of the invasion. The embattled 29th Infantry Division and supporting forces from Omaha Beach relieved Pointe du Hoc on 8 June, and pushed on to link up with the 101st Airborne Division east of Carentan on 10 June. This brought Omaha and Utah Beaches into contact. Meanwhile the 1st Infantry Division and supporting forces pushed eastwards from Omaha Beach to link up with British forces northeast of Bayeux on 9 June. This established continuous contact with Gold, Juno and Sword Beaches. By 12 June the lodgment had pushed to the outskirts of Airel, Caumont, Tilly sur Seules and Caen. Over sixteen divisions were ashore, and supplies were pouring ashore as well.

### 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion

#### World War II Combat Chronicle

The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion activated on 1 September 1943 in Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Ranger battalions are all-volunteer, and designed for such specialized missions as scouting, screening, raiding, ambushing and spear-heading assaults with attacks on key terrain. In World War II American Rangers were heavily influenced by British Commandos, and borrowed tactics, techniques and procedures from them. After intense training the battalion shipped to Leominster, England, and undertook further training in England and Scotland for its role in Operation OVERLORD.

On June 6, 1944 – D-Day – the 5th Ranger Battalion came ashore on Omaha



Beach. Original plans were for it land at the Pointe du Hoc to reinforce the 2nd Ranger Battalion, but it diverted to Omaha when it did not receive a signal indicating the 2nd was successfully ashore by the appointed time. The 5th Ranger Battalion's alternate mission was to attack overland to secure the Pointe du Hoc. German resistance on Omaha Beach was determined, and the American assault there pinned down. In this chaos Brigadier General Norman Cota of the 29th Infantry Division famously exclaimed "Rangers lead the way!" - now the Ranger motto -- and the embattled Rangers pressed forward under heavy fire as the vanguard of the advance off the beaches. The battalion broke through to seize Vierville on the first day. Beating back fierce German counterattacks, the 5th Ranger Battalion and accompanying units broke through to the Pointe du Hoc and relieved the hard pressed 2nd Rangers on June 8, then pushed on to Grandcamp and Isigny.

After absorbing replacements, retraining and security duties, the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed to the assault on Brest beginning 29 August. Brest was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and long the principal German submarine base in France. Ranger patrols swiftly probed outlying defenses, compromising German positions on the high ground around Brest. The Rangers screened difficult terrain between units as the noose around Brest tightened. In the grinding attack the Rangers were assigned some of the most formidable missions, seizing critical forts, pillboxes and positions in carefully coordinated combined arms assaults. In the savage fighting for Brest the battalion killed 624 and captured 2114, while suffering 137 casualties itself.

The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion secured the 12th Army Group Headquarters at Arlon, Belgium during October and November 1944, and then was attached to the Sixth Cavalry Group during savage fighting from Diesen to Ludweiler in Germany. During the German Ardennes Offensive the battalion defended St. Avold, and several times secured sectors over 10,000 meters across - appropriate to a division. In February 1945 the 5th Rangers crossed the Saar River, infiltrated behind German lines, and established a blocking position near Zerf to trap retreating enemy and block reinforcements. This precipitated a savage nine day battle that crushed enemy resistance in the area, opening a route to the Rhine. Once across the Rhine the battalion cleared assigned sectors, participated in the race to the Danube, and ended the war in Pocking, Germany. Sixty-seven Rangers from the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion are buried in American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries: twenty-three in Luxem-



bourg, fourteen in Normandy, thirteen in Brittany, eleven in Lorraine, two in Epinal, and one each in the Ardennes, Cambridge, Henri-Chapelle and North Africa. The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion earned two Distinguished Unit Citations and the French Croix de Guerre during World War II.

## 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion

### World War II Combat Chronicle

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion activated on 1 April, 1943, in Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Rangers are highly trained volunteers, and Ranger battalions are intended for such specialized missions as scouting, screening, raiding, ambushing and spearheading attacks or invasions with assaults on key terrain. In World War II American Rangers were heavily influenced by British Commandos, and borrowed many tactics, techniques and procedures from them. In December, 1943, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion deployed to Bude, England, and prepared for participation in Operation OVERLORD.

On June 6, 1944 - D-Day - the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion attacked to seize the dominant cliff-bound Pointe du Hoc and destroy German heavy guns positioned there. The guns were positioned in such a manner that they could disrupt landings at both Omaha and Utah Beaches, and had the highest single priority for pre-invasion targets. Despite delay, disruption and casualties in getting ashore, the Rangers, assisted by rocket propelled ropes and rope ladders, climbed the cliffs while under fire and had parties on top within fifteen minutes. These formed up into ever larger groups as more and more men made it to the top, and moved on to designated targets. The guns had been moved from their initial prepared positions, but the Rangers nevertheless tracked them down and destroyed them. They pushed on to cut the coastal highway behind Pointe du Hoc, and beat back furious German counterattacks to secure their gains. Meanwhile a contingent of the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion and the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion had fought their way ashore onto Omaha Beach. In concert with the 29th Infantry Division and supporting units they fought their way overland, relieving the embattled defenders of Pointe du Hoc on 8 June.

After a period of security, reserve and retraining, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was attached to the 29th Infantry Division for the assault on Brest. Brest

was heavily fortified, stoutly defended, and the principal German submarine base in France. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion was to secure the right flank of the 29th Infantry Division, seize the Lochrist Battery with its 280mm guns, and clear the Le Conquet Peninsula. After fierce fighting the battalion accomplished each of these objectives, at times in concert with the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). The fighting for Hill 63 was particularly savage, and the capture of the Lochrist Battery particularly daring.

The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion redeployed into the tough fighting for the Hurtgen Forest. In a particularly noteworthy engagement it secured Bergstein and nearby Castle Hill (Hill 400), and then defended them against furious counterattacks while under heavy artillery fire. The battalion moved on to cross the Roer and the Rhine Rivers, and in concert with the 102nd Cavalry Group formed a combined arms force to cover the V Corps advance into Germany. When the war in Europe ended, the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion had secured the major German maneuver area at Grafenwohr and pushed contingents into Czechoslovakia.

Seventy-six soldiers from the 2nd Ranger Infantry battalion are buried in or memorialized at American Battle Monuments Commission Cemeteries: thirty-nine in Normandy, twelve in Henri-Chapelle, twelve in the Netherlands, eleven in Brittany, and two in Cambridge. The 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion earned the Presidential Unit Citation, the French Croix de Guerre and the British Military Medal in World War II.

### Rudder's Command Post

At 0745 Colonel James E. Rudder's moved his command post from the beach under the cliffs to a crater next to the German RL 409A 37mm antiaircraft bunker on the eastern edge of the Pointe du Hoc. The bunker seems to have been destroyed by a direct hit from one the USS Satterlee's 5-inch guns just as the three companies of 2nd Ranger Battalion landed on the narrow beach. Rudder himself was observed by his communications officer, Lt James "Ike" Eikner, to have had "the living hell scared out of him" by the falling concrete and debris. The debris from the collapsed cliff did form a large mound that aided the Rangers in their climb. It later helped as supplies and ammunition were carried aloft to the beleaguered Rangers.

At this point, Colonel Rudder's communications were intermittent. His connection with higher command was a signal light EE-84 that allowed him to direct naval gunfire -- crucial to the survival of the Rangers on the Pointe du Hoc. The command post itself became the focus of several remarkable photos taken during the battle. One of the most famous shots includes an American flag draped over the rocks. The flag was placed for the pragmatic purpose of identifying the Rangers to aggressive low-flying American P47 fighter pilots more so than for patriotic display. The prisoners seen on the upper level in the photo were German soldiers and Italian laborers whose distinctive white hats can also be seen in images of prisoners being taken aboard the battleship, USS Texas. Col James Rudder himself appears in top right corner of the photo watching the prisoners being taken away. Sitting on the huge concrete block to the left of the picture is Ranger Cpl. Lou Lisko.

## 155mm Gun

155 GPF FILLOUX, model K 418, range 19,5 KM.

Put into service by the French in 1917, it was taken into service by the U.S. Army as a 155 mm gun (M1918 M1) by the field artillery. It remained in service until the beginning of WWII. In 1940 the French had about 450 canons in stock, the greater part taken by the Wehrmacht at the Armistice as the 15.5 cm FeldKanone. They were dispersed along coastal defenses as of 1942. Barrel length: 5915 mm. The mount allowed a traverse range of 30 degrees each way and an elevation from 0 to +35 degrees. The gun fired explosive rounds with a muzzle velocity of 735 m/sec. The maximum shot range was 19,500 meters.

Sgt. Leonard Lomell, D Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

We were supposed to be relieved earlier in the day. We were just supposed to take the place and turn it over to the regular troops coming in after us. I had the utmost confidence that somebody would get through or the next unit that was supposed to come would do their part. They'll get held up and these

things happen. No, I never lost faith in my units that were backing us up and with us and anything. I was surrounded by the Rangers and they're the best of the best.

Cpt. John Raaen Jr., HQ Company, 5th Ranger Battalion

The battalion plus the 116th showed up that next morning and we attacked, meeting no enemy resistance, and relieved Pointe du Hoc. They were happy. And we were already swapping stories and lies and things like that about what had happened to us so far, "Well, you should've seen what happened to us," you know.

Sgt. Frank South, HQ Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion

When the rest of the 2nd showed up it was a big relief. And it was a great personal relief to me when I saw Willy Clark, who had a very peculiar gait when he started running, so I saw him coming across the field. Willy landed with Charlie Company, the one which was so badly hit. So yeah, we were concerned about when we were going to be relieved, but we were awfully relieved when we were relieved.

## Epilogue

### Watch Ronald Reagan's Speech

The assault and ensuing defense of Pointe du Hoc is now an icon representing courage and determination in the face of adversity. About one hundred and eighty men – less than a third of the number ideally envisioned – had fought their way up cliffs considered unassailable. They over-ran dispersed objectives, destroyed the critical guns, and then held out against long odds until relieved. Weather, terrain, chance, and a determined opponent conspired against them. The men that relieved them similarly overcame great challenges to accomplish their missions.

Forty years later President Ronald Reagan, seeking a singular example to epitomize the competence, courage and sacrifice of the generation that won World War II, seized upon “The Boys of Pointe du Hoc” as the few who could evoke the magnificence of the many.

Pointe du Hoc is now far more than a place or a battlefield. It is a legend to inspire generations yet unborn to be worthy of the sacrifices that have been made on their behalf.

Now visit: The Normandy Campaign: The Advance Inland

### Ronald Reagan’s Speech

Pointe Du Hoc, 6 June 1984

We’re here to mark that day in history when the Allied armies joined in battle to reclaim this continent to liberty. For four long years, much of Europe had been under a terrible shadow. Free nations had fallen, Jews cried out in the camps, millions cried out for liberation. Europe was enslaved, and the world prayed for its rescue. Here in Normandy the rescue began. Here the Allies stood and fought against tyranny in a giant undertaking unparalleled in human history.

We stand on a lonely, windswept point on the northern shore of France. The air is soft, but forty years ago at this moment, the air was dense with smoke and the cries of men, and the air was filled with the crack of rifle fire and the roar of cannon. At dawn, on the morning of the 6th of June, 1944, 225 Rangers jumped off the British landing craft and ran to the bottom of these cliffs. Their mission was one of the most difficult and daring of the invasion: to climb these sheer and desolate cliffs and take out the enemy guns. The Allies had been told that some of the mightiest of these guns were here and they would be trained on the beaches to stop the Allied advance.

The Rangers looked up and saw the enemy soldiers - at the edge of the cliffs shooting down at them with machine guns and throwing grenades. And the

American Rangers began to climb. They shot rope ladders over the face of these cliffs and began to pull themselves up. When one Ranger fell, another would take his place. When one rope was cut, a Ranger would grab another and begin his climb again. They climbed, shot back, and held their footing. Soon, one by one, the Rangers pulled themselves over the top, and in seizing the firm land at the top of these cliffs, they began to seize back the continent of Europe. Two hundred and twenty-five came here. After two days of fighting, only ninety could still bear arms.

Behind me is a memorial that symbolizes the Ranger daggers that were thrust into the top of these cliffs. And before me are the men who put them there.

These are the boys of Pointe du Hoc. These are the men who took the cliffs. These are the champions who helped free a continent. These are the heroes who helped end a war.

Gentlemen, I look at you and I think of the words of Stephen Spender's poem. You are men who in your "lives fought for life . . . and left the vivid air singed with your honor."

I think I know what you may be thinking right now - thinking "we were just part of a bigger effort; everyone was brave that day." Well, everyone was. Do you remember the story of Bill Millin of the 51st Highlanders? Forty years ago today, British troops were pinned down near a bridge, waiting desperately for help. Suddenly, they heard the sound of bagpipes, and some thought they were dreaming. Well, they weren't. They looked up and saw Bill Millin with his bagpipes, leading the reinforcements and ignoring the smack of bullets into the ground around him.

Lord Lovat was with him - Lord Lovat of Scotland, who calmly announced when he got to the bridge, "Sorry, I'm a few minutes late," as if he'd been delayed by a traffic jam, when in truth he'd just come from the bloody fighting on Sword Beach, which he and his men had just taken.

There was the impossible valor of the Poles who threw themselves between the enemy and the rest of Europe as the invasion took hold, and the unsur-

passed courage of the Canadians who had already seen the horrors of war on this coast. They knew what awaited them there, but they would not be deterred. And once they hit Juno Beach, they never looked back.

All of these men were part of a roll call of honor with names that spoke of a pride as bright as the colors they bore; The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, Poland's 24th Lancers, the Royal Scots Fusiliers, the Screaming Eagles, the Yeomen of England's armored divisions, the forces of Free France, the Coast Guard's "Matchbox Fleet," and you, the American Rangers.

Forty summers have passed since the battle that you fought here. You were young the day you took these cliffs; some of you were hardly more than boys, with the deepest joys of life before you. Yet, you risked everything here. Why? Why did you do it? What impelled you to put aside the instinct for self-preservation and risk your lives to take these cliffs? What inspired all the men of the armies that met here? We look at you, and somehow we know the answer. It was faith and belief; it was loyalty and love.

The men of Normandy had faith that what they were doing was right, faith that they fought for all humanity, faith that a just God would grant them mercy on this beachhead or on the next. It was the deep knowledge - and pray God we have not lost it - that there is a profound moral difference between the use of force for liberation and the use of force for conquest. You were here to liberate, not to conquer, and so you and those others did not doubt your cause. And you were right not to doubt.

You all knew that some things are worth dying for. One's country is worth dying for, and democracy is worth dying for, because it's the most deeply honorable form of government ever devised by man. All of you loved liberty. All of you were willing to fight tyranny, and you knew the people of your countries were behind you.

The Americans who fought here that morning knew word of the invasion was spreading through the darkness back home. They fought - or felt in their hearts, though they couldn't know in fact - that in Georgia they were filling the churches at four A.M., in Kansas they were kneeling on their porches and pray-

ing, and in Philadelphia they were ringing the Liberty Bell.

Something else helped the men of D day; their rock-hard belief that Providence would have a great hand in the events that would unfold here; that God was an ally in this great cause. And so, the night before the invasion, when Colonel Wolverton asked his parachute troops to kneel with him in prayer, he told them: Do not bow your heads, but look up so you can see God and ask His blessing in what we're about to do. Also, that night, General Matthew Ridgway on his cot, listening in the darkness for the promise God made to Joshua: "I will not fail thee nor forsake thee."

These are the things that impelled them; these are the things that shaped the unity of the Allies.

When the war was over, there were lives to be rebuilt and governments to be returned to the people. There were nations to be reborn. Above all, there was a new peace to be assured. These were huge and daunting tasks. But the Allies summoned strength from the faith, belief, loyalty, and love of those who fell here. They rebuilt a new Europe together.

There was first a great reconciliation among those who had been enemies, all of whom had suffered so greatly. The United States did its part, creating the Marshall Plan to help rebuild our allies and our former enemies. The Marshall Plan led to the Atlantic Alliance - a great alliance that serves to this day as our shield for freedom, for prosperity, and for peace.

In spite of our great efforts and successes, not all that followed the end of the war was happy or planned. Some liberated countries were lost. The great sadness of this loss echoes down to our own time in the streets of Warsaw, Prague, and East Berlin. Soviet troops that came to the center of this continent did not leave when peace came. They're still there, uninvited, unwanted, unyielding, almost forty years after the war. Because of this, allied forces still stand on this continent. Today, as forty years ago, our armies are here for only one purpose - to protect and defend democracy. The only territories we hold are memorials like this one and graveyards where our heroes rest.



We in America have learned bitter lessons from two world wars: It is better to be here ready to protect the peace than to take blind shelter across the sea, rushing to respond only after freedom is lost. We've learned that isolationism never was and never will be an acceptable response to tyrannical governments with an expansionist intent.

But we try always to be prepared for peace; prepared to deter aggression; prepared to negotiate the reduction of arms; and yes, prepared to reach out again in the spirit of reconciliation. In truth, there is no reconciliation we would welcome more than a reconciliation with the Soviet Union, so, together we can lessen the risks of war, now and forever.

It's fitting to remember here the great losses also suffered by the Russian people during World War II: 20 million perished, a terrible price that testifies to all the world the necessity of ending war. I tell you from my heart that we in the United States do not want war. We want to wipe from the face of the earth the terrible weapons that man now has in his hands. And I tell you, we are ready to seize that beachhead. We look for some sign from the Soviet Union that they are willing to move forward, that they share our desire and love for peace, and that they will give up the ways of conquest. There must be a changing there that will allow us to turn our hope into action.

We will pray forever that someday that changing will come. But for now, particularly today, it is good and fitting to renew our commitment to each other, to our freedom, and to the alliance that protects it.

We are bound today by what bound us forty years ago, the same loyalties, traditions, and beliefs. We're bound by reality. The strength of America's allies is vital to the United States, and the American security guarantee is essential to the continued freedom of Europe's democracies. We were with you then; we are with you now. Your hopes are our hopes, and your destiny is our destiny.

Here, in this place where the West held together, let us make a vow to our dead. Let us show them by our actions that we understand what they died for. Let our actions say to them the words for which Matthew Ridgway listened: "I will not fail thee nor forsake thee."

Strengthened by their courage, heartened by their value and borne by their memory, let us continue to stand for the ideals for which they lived and died.

Thank you very much, and God bless you all.

